

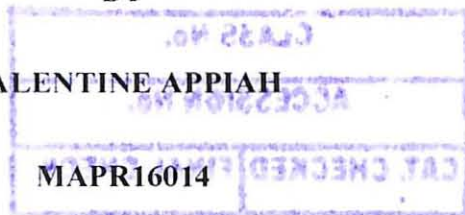
GHANA INSTITUTE OF JOURNALISM

SCHOOL OF RESEARCH AND GRADUATE STUDIES

THE USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA FOR EXTERNAL COMMUNICATION IN THE
HOSPITALITY INDUSTRY: A CASE OF LA-PALM ROYAL BEACH HOTEL

BY

VALENTINE APPIAH



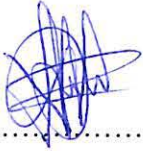
A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO THE SCHOOL OF RESEARCH AND
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(M. A.) IN PUBLIC RELATIONS.

OCTOBER, 2017

STUDENT'S DECLARATION

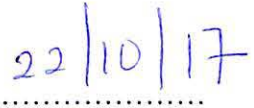
I do hereby declare that this dissertation is the result of my original research, and that no part of it has been presented for another degree in this institute or elsewhere. All references used in the work have been fully acknowledged.

I bear sole responsibility for any shortcomings.



.....

VALENTINE APPIAH
(CANDIDATE)



.....

DATE

SUPERVISOR'S CERTIFICATION

I hereby declare that the preparation of this dissertation was supervised by me in accordance with the guidelines of supervision of dissertation laid down by the Ghana Institute of Journalism.



.....
MR. HENRY KOJO BONSU-OWU
(SUPERVISOR)



.....
DATE

DEDICATION

I dedicate this work to my wife, Mrs. Racheal Appiah, my son, Obrempong Yaw Ofori-Appiah and my parents, Mr. E.P Appiah, Mr. Emmanuel Danso and Ama Ayeiwaa for their love and support.

I also dedicate this work to my beloved late Sister, Gifty Nana Yaa Korkor Appiah.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

My utmost thanks goes to God almighty for his guidance and protection throughout the period of this study. I am also very grateful to my supervisor, Mr. Henry Kojo Bonsu-Owu for his time, patience and counsel throughout the period of this work.

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ABSTRACT

This study assessed the use of social media for external communication in the hospitality industry by adopting La-Palm Royal Beach Hotel as a case study. The study focused on identifying the social media technologies used by La Palm Royal Beach Hotel, explored how these social media technologies are used for external communication but also examined the effectiveness of these social media technologies. As a single case study, semi-structured questionnaires and in-depth interviews were employed to obtain primary data from staff, management and key external publics of the hotel. It emerged that the hotel employs various social media technologies namely; Facebook, Instagram, WhatsApp and LinkedIn to interact with its external publics. Many of these social media technologies are integrated into the Hotel's website and are deployed as a composite. Social media at La Palm Royal beach hotel is targeted at existing clients, prospects and partners of the hotel. The organisation adopts a strategic approach to social media management, but it does not have documented social media policy, and guideline. The use of social media at La Palm Royal Beach Hotel is strategic but social media governance is weak in the organisation because of the lack of a documented social media policy and clear written out guidelines. This makes it difficult for the organisation to attain the full benefits of social media as a tool for external communication

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Chapter Overview

This chapter offers the background to this research, the problem statement, the objectives, the questions for the study, the significance of the study, the scope of study, and the organization of the total work.

1.2 Background of Study

The Internet is one of the main tools that has revolutionized the computer and communications world. The invention of the telegraph, telephone, radio, computer and any form of tool that is used for communication has set the stage for this unprecedented integration of capabilities. The Internet is at once a world-wide broadcasting capability, a mechanism for information dissemination, and a medium for collaboration and interaction between individuals and their computers without regard for geographic location. The Internet represents one of the most successful examples of the benefits of sustained investment and commitment to research and development of information infrastructure (Barry et al., 1997).

The Internet today is a widespread information infrastructure, the initial prototype of what is often called the National (or Global or Galactic) Information Infrastructure. Its history is complex and involves many aspects - technological, organizational, and community. And its influence reaches not only to the technical fields of computer communications but throughout society as we move toward increasing use of online tools to accomplish electronic commerce, information acquisition, and community operations (Barry et al., 1997)

The history of the Internet dates to the early 1960s in the United States and this marks when the world started using the internet as a means of communication in various aspects of life during the Cold War period, when the world was bi-polar: The United States and the Soviet Union were competing in expanding their influence in the world, viewing each other with great caution and suspicion. On October 4, 1957, the Soviet Union launched the first space satellite, Sputnik. The Sputnik success necessitated American reaction (ARPA, 2004).

It was a question of pride and leadership. The US Department of Defense responded by establishing the Advanced Research Projects Agency (ARPA), designed to promote research that would ensure that the USA compete with and excel over the USSR in any technological race. ARPA's mission was to produce innovative research ideas, to provide meaningful technological impact that went far beyond the convention evolutionary developmental approaches, and to act on these ideas by developing prototype systems (ARPA, 2004).

This movement into the digital world allows individuals to share knowledge, entertain one another, and promote dialogs among different cultures (Budden et al., 2011; Kumar et al., 2010). From a consumer's perspective, using information communication technologies has a number of benefits including efficiency, convenience, richer and participative information, a broader selection of products, competitive pricing, cost reduction, and product diversity (Bayo-Moriones & Lera-López, 2007). Online social networking tends to enhance these benefits, as consumers are able to communicate more proactively. For example, through online social networking, consumers are able to seek out other consumers' opinions about specific products. In doing so, consumers have been shown to value their peers' judgments more than the firms' promotions, indicating a shift in the locus of persuasive power (Berthon et al., 2012; Pitt et al., 2002).

The Internet has many faces and you can do almost everything using it: send e-mails, surf sites, download files, participate in discussion groups or role-playing games, chat. It can easily be a source of addiction especially because it gathers so many resources and allows for so many forms of activity. An important role is played by the anonymity of the user, especially with socially unacceptable areas such as pornography (pointed to its more radical form) (ITU, 2013b).

Some are of the challenges associated with the use of social media are; Violation of user's data protection rights. This means that the inclusion by the users of personal details regarding to themselves or other users in a social network involve a risk of violation in data protection subject. Another challenge is identity fraud. Thus the vast amount of information related to a user in the social network represents a risk to his safety and privacy if we consider the possible use of the data by unauthorized third parts to misappropriate our identity. There is also an absence of uniform rule at the international level. Absence of international standard regulation to use the social network can only increase the lack of security for the users (ITU, 2013b).

With the upsurge in the number of internet users the use of social media has developed over the past years. Countless organizations today proactively use social media such as Facebook, Twitter, WhatsApp, Instagram, Snapchat and others as a vehicle to reach out to millions of prospective and repeat customers. Even though the lowest household Internet penetration is found in Africa and the developing world, there is still a relative increase in the use of Internet. Statistically, in 2012 there were 24% of households with Internet access in the developing world. The figure shot up to 28% for the month ending September, 2013. In 2010 there were 10.64% people with access to the Internet per 100 inhabitants in the Sub-Sahara African, and 15.35% in 2012 (ITU, 2013b).

Globally Facebook adds 500,000 new users every day; 6 new profiles every second. As of December 2011 the online social networking application Facebook had a total of 845 million active users, out of which 425 million used Facebook mobile products (Facebook, 2011). In 2015 Facebook had 1.71 billion users and adds 500,000 new user every day. Twitter has 320 million users and Instagram with 400 million users (Kit smith, 2016).

100 million people were using Facebook each month across Africa, over 80% via mobile. That figure has now jumped to over 120 million. Four and a half million of those Facebook users are based in Kenya, 15 million in Nigeria and 12 million in South Africa, in statistics first reported by Reuters. Overall, around 9% of Africans use social media, with South Africans among the world leaders in time spent on social networks with an average of 3.2 hours a day, compared to a global average of 2.4 hours, according to data from marketing consultants We Are Social (CNN, 2014).

Ghana, in 1999 had a total population of 18,599,549 and 20,000 people out of that number was internet users (Kasule, 2013). According to Internet World Statistic (IWS) (2013), this number continued to rise from 2,085,501 internet users out of a population of 24,791,073 in 2011 to 3,568,757 internet users out of a population of 25,292,392 as at June 30 2012. According the Wikipedia encyclopaedia (Wikipedia, 2013), Ghana was one of the first countries in Africa to achieve the connection to the World Wide Web. Again, Ghana has the 4th fastest Internet connection on the African continent and the 87th fastest internet connection in the world, out of 182 countries. The use of Internet was not predominant until in 2011 when Ghana's internet subscription rose sharply, and in 2010, there were 165 licensed internet service providers in Ghana with 29 running fiber optic. VSAT operators were 176, of which 57 functioned, and 99

internet operators were authorized to the public, and private data and packet-switched network operators were 25 (Wikipedia, 2013).

Research conducted on the growth and usage of internet in Ghana shows that 40.6% of Ghanaians depend on the internet as a means of gathering information on products and services. Study on the growth and usage of internet in Ghana also shows that 33% of Ghanaians make use of online communication always, 25% made use of it frequently, with 30% using it occasionally. It just goes to suggest just how much communicating online has become part of the Ghanaian socio-cultural environment. According to the internet world statistics, out of Ghana's population of about 26,908,262 (IWS, 2016), 7,958,675 use internet, representing 29.6% of the population. 3,500,000 Facebook subscribers for June 2016, representing 13.0% penetration rate (IWS, 2016).

The average number of Tweets people sent per day on social networking and microblogging website Twitter during February 2011 was 140million (Twitter counter, 2011). Twitter also reported a whopping 182% increase in number of mobile users over the previous year.

According to Pew Research as cite in Lanz et al., (2010) more people are relying on sources they trust such as social media reviews made by their friends, family and colleagues rather than trusting commercially driven institutions such as news broadcasting agencies and advertisers. Hence, being truthful and genuine on platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn and Twitter can help a business build a huge base of loyal customers.

Instagram has grown over the years and reached 300 million monthly active users. The website is most popular in Middle East and Africa (34% of users), Latin America (33% of users) and

North America (25% of users). The age group that uses the most this sharing service is represented by persons who are between 16 and 24 years old (41%). Then, 35% of the users are between 25 and 34 years. A total of 20% of mobile users are accessing the platform on a regular basis (Lanz et al., 2010).

1.3 Problem Statement

Although there have been a number of studies conducted on how social media have affected the image of other sectors in Ghana, there have been minimal studies on how it has influenced the image of the hospitality industry in Ghana. It has become a channel that allows interaction and give companies an opportunity to address the problems and concerns of their customers, which if done effectively, contributes in building the brand (Carragher Buchanan, & Puia, 2010).

Today, thanks in large part to social media, we have many different levels of communication, each with a specific purpose and etiquette. Social media now allow us to have a more in-depth relationship with customers as it allows for phone and video calls. Social media helps to network with colleagues, market product and services to a larger and wider population via online communication options that allow users to participate, offer feedback, receive information and share ideas and cost saving in terms of advertising. The balance of good and evil in the world needs to be maintained. Naturally when a far reaching medium such as the internet brings us social networking sites that spice up our lives a little, it also attracts the fractious few of society. Some of the things that could lead to potential social disaster is hacking, social media can also be used to tarnish an image with false claims. Another potential danger of putting up pictures and videos on these websites is that they could be used for defamation which can lead to loss of productivity.

Although all these advantages and disadvantages exist in the use of social media platforms, how effective have these platforms been in communicating with external publics?

1.4 Objective Of Study

The general objective was to find out whether the social media platforms used by La-Palm is an effective tool in communicating with external publics.

The specific objectives:

1. To find out which social media platforms are used for external communication
2. To access how these social media platforms are used in communicating with external publics
3. To ascertain whether there is an impact on the social media platforms on external public
4. To identify the challenges associated with the use of social media platforms at La-Palm Royal Beach Hotel.

1.5 Research Questions

1. What social media platforms are used in La-Palm Royal Beach Hotel?
2. How are these social media platforms used in communicating with external public?
3. How effective are these social media platforms in external communication?
4. What are the challenges associated with the use of social media platforms as communication tools?

1.6 Significance of Study

This research is relevant because it will serve as a useful reference material for other researchers and produce knowledge that can be applied outside a research setting for further research. It will also form the foundation for informing organizations about the use of social

media platforms as effective communication tool in the hospitality industry. The study will also provide a significant and logical perspective for understanding the challenges of using social media platforms as a communication tool.

1.7 Scope Of Study And Limitations of the Study

The hospitality industry comprise of services such as lodging, event planning, transportation and all the fields with the tourism industry. The industry also deals with hotels, restaurants and other recreational activities. However, this research limited itself to the hotel services, specifically the La-Palm Royal Beach Hotel and its services.

This research could have also used the larger publics of the la-Palm Royal Beach Hotel: internal and external. However, this work has been limited to only the external publics of the La-Palm Royal Beach Hotel (the guest that patronize the service of La-Palm Royal Hotel).

1.8 Organization of the Study

This research work is in five chapters. Chapter one talks about the background to the study, problem statement and objectives of the study. The chapter also talks about the research questions, justification for the research work and the scope of the study. Chapter Two focuses on review of relevant related literature. Chapter Three focuses on Methodology. It also discuss the research design, the data collection instrument and procedure used in gathering data for the research work. Chapter four is about analyzing, discussing and the presenting of findings. The summary of findings, conclusion and recommendations make up Chapter Five.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

This chapter presents a review of extant literature related to the use of social media for external communication. The chapter focuses on the nature and uses of social media as a new media technology and also how new media can be leveraged for external communication. Other themes explored in the literature review include an overview of the hospitality industry in Ghana and the uses of social media in the hospitality industry. The chapter also presents basis of the systems theory of communication as a suitable theory for further exploration of issues identified in the study.

2.2 Brief evolution of New Media technologies

The world has changed in dramatic ways since 1984 when the internet debuted. Over the past three decades, the maturity of the Internet has significantly altered how people communicate, and gather information. Sequel to this, an information environment has emerged from the simultaneous, rapid, and interconnected evolution of transmission systems, interfaces, and content quantity, quality, and structure (Biocca, 2001; Shuhada & Naidu, 2016).

New media is the blanket term used to define all communication pathways related to the internet and the interplay between technology, images and sound. New media evolves and morphs continuously such that it does not lend itself to a strict definition. Noting this, Peters (2009) describes new media as 'media we do not yet know how to talk about' (P18). This shows that new media are uncertain objects, their terms are unclear; their use, purpose and impact are not yet fully understood. However, for clarity, Boczkowski (2004) posits that new media

descriptions can be crystallised by the use of images, words, and sounds in web enhanced communication. These networks of images, sounds, and text data are different from traditional or old media formats such as hardcopy newspapers. Most communication technologies enjoying the 'new' accolade are digital, often having characteristics of being manipulated, networkable, dense, compressible, and interactive (Boczkowski, 2004). Thus, new media technologies very much rely on the internet.

Internet enhanced or online forms of communication incorporate modes of contact missing from more traditional or conventional means of interaction at a distance. Communications that would once have been text-only or voice-only are now much richer, weaving together text, voice, body language, and even shared experiences. Many people are still learning how to process these cues while receiving and transmitting them through the medium of a computer, a challenge that can make effective communication difficult; but for many young people, for whom these technologies have always existed, interpreting and interacting this way is already second nature (Biocca, 2001; Boczkowski, 2004).

The new media consortium (2007) holds that the nature of communication has undergone substantial change and the change is not over. For example, email and other digital forms of communication have had a profound effect on the way people keep in touch. Communications are shorter and more frequent than when letters were the norm; response time has greatly diminished; it comes as a surprise if someone we wish to contact does not have an email address or any social media account. Many professionals today are accustomed to the daily duty of reading and answering emails and other digital messaging applications as they arrive (New media consortium, 2007).

Further, the new media evolution is advanced by the availability of communication technologies that offer new communication opportunities. Internet calling services like Skype or Viber turn a computer, a webcam and a headset into a video phone. While not new, blogs have also grown in usage over the last few years and are now a common way for many people to share their ideas with a broad audience and, in most cases, to read back from that audience. Both Internet calling and blogs are relatively easy to accept, because they are based on understood models (New media consortium, 2007).

The evolution of communication technology has profound implications for the context of communication. The context in which an interaction occurs has significant effects on communication. In face to-face encounters, factors ranging from psychological to environmental to cultural all have an effect on how the message is transmitted and how it is understood. Online communication is also subject to context and often brings with it additional contextual issues that may have an effect on the intended message. The type of technology being used to facilitate the interaction, for example, has a bearing on the environmental context of the conversation. A conversation taking place through instant messaging in between meetings will have a different flavour than if the same topic were discussed in a virtual world, on the phone, or in an online meeting room (Gitelman, 2006).

Increasingly, a computer with an internet connection is the locus of a range of interactions in a variety of media and a gateway to an array of social spaces for work and play. New media clusters like Facebook and LinkedIn and virtual environments like Second Life have become online meeting spaces where users— members, residents, or players—can interact and express themselves (Gitelman, 2006). New media spaces give people a way to identify themselves

(through personal profile) and different means of communication ranging from text and voice chat to public message boards and/or private messaging.

New media, particularly social media also offer a way to keep in touch with existing communities that users belong to offline, such as social and professional groups. They also make it possible for people who would not normally communicate more than a few times a year to keep in touch—colleagues met at conferences, for instance, or friends met through the online community itself (Gitelman, 2006; New Media Consortium, 2007). Similarly, organisations also rely on social networking sites and other new media platforms to stay in constant touch with their clients.

2.3 Conceptualisation and Kinds of Social Media

Broadly speaking social media refers to the tools and platforms for interactions among people in which they create, share, and/or exchange information in virtual communities and networks. Social media is dependent on the internet and other facilitative devices such as computers, smart phones and tablets (Skog, 2005). Boyd and Ellison (2008) also define social network sites as “web-based services that allow individuals to (1) construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system, (2) articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection, and (3) view and traverse their list of connections and those made by others within the system” (P. 211). The nature and nomenclature of these connections may vary from site to site but the above listed conditions are pertinent.

It would be observed from the burgeoning that social media is new media technology. Indeed social media is an example of new media forms of communication because of the dependence of internet. Social media are also called Social Networking Sites (SNS) and by their nature

they are about conversations, community, connecting with the audience and building relationships. Thus, social media or Social Networking Sites are not just broadcast pathways or sales and marketing channels (Liu, Maes, & Davenport, 2006), but spaces for engagement.

There are deluge of social network sites, these fascinating platforms for communication continue to attract millions of users, many of whom have integrated social media into their daily lives. Boyd and Ellison (2008) posit that there are hundreds of SNSs, with various technological affordances, supporting a wide range of interests and practices. While their key technological features are fairly consistent, the cultures that emerge around social media varies. Most social media support the maintenance of pre-existing social networks, but others help strangers connect based on shared interests, political views, or activities. Some social media cater to diverse audiences, while others attract people based on common language or shared racial, sexual, religious, or nationality-based identities. Social media also vary in the extent to which they incorporate new information and communication tools, such as mobile connectivity, blogging, and photo or video-sharing (Boyd & Ellison, 2008)

2.3.1 Popular social media platforms

There a number of social media sites, however some have gained wide usage than others. Some of the most popular social media are listed in this section with brief descriptions.

Facebook: This is arguably the most popular social media platform around the world. Facebook is a social networking site where users can set up a profile, create formal connections to people they know, communicate, and share preferences and interests. Facebook's fastest-growing demographic is users over 25, however many active Facebook users are youthful millennials. Facebook was established in 2004 and is based in Menlo Park, California. This

social media has more than 1.94 billion monthly active users as of March 2017 (Chaffey, 2016; Stelzner, 2016).

Flickr: This is an image and video hosting website and online community. Photos from Flickr can be shared on Facebook and Twitter and other social networking sites. Flickr was founded in 2004 and acquired by technology giant Yahoo! in 2005 (New media consortium, 2007).

Instagram: this is also a free photo and video sharing app that allows users to apply digital filters, frames and special effects to their photos and then share them on a variety of social networking sites. After its launch in 2010, Instagram rapidly gained popularity, with one million registered users in two months, 10 million in a year. Instagram is owned by Facebook. (Chaffey, 2016).

Snapchat: This is a mobile app that lets users send photos and videos to friends or to their “story.” Snaps disappear after viewing or after 24 hours. Snapchat currently has over 100 million daily active users. The company was founded in 2011 and is now registered as Snap Inc (Stelzner, 2016).

Skype: This is an Internet calling service that enables two-party audio and video chat and multi-party audioconferencing. Skype can make computer-to-computer calls as well as computer-to-phone calls (land- or mobile phones). Skype is owned by technology giant Microsoft (Chaffey, 2016; Stelzner, 2016).

Twitter: This social media is a cross between instant messaging and blogging that allows users to send short (140-character) updates. Users can also follow the updates of selected friends. Twitter launched in 2006 in California, where the company is still based. In 2012, more than

100 million users posted 340 million tweets a day, and the service handled an average of 1.6 billion search queries per day (Chaffey, 2016).

YouTube: Is an online video site owned by Google Inc. Videos are uploaded by users and can be viewed free. Users can leave comments on video pages. Most of the content on YouTube has been uploaded by individuals, but media corporations including CBS, the BBC, Vevo, and Hulu offer some of their material via YouTube as part of the YouTube partnership program. YouTube was founded in 2005 as a private company but was acquired by Google the following year (Chaffey, 2016).

2.4 Social media and Corporate Communications

The exponential user growth in social media makes it attractive for companies looking for ways to connect and remain in touch with various categories of stakeholders. The deployment of social media for corporate communication is changing the understanding and practice of Public relations in the corporate environment (Shuhada & Naidu, 2016). Social media and corresponding new media tools have occasioned dramatic changes in the field of public relations as these technologies have empowered professionals to strategically communicate with internal and external audiences (Wright & Hinson, 2010). The importance of social media to the field of public relations cannot be underscored, and is essential for the operations of many organizations.

The very definition of public relations is evolving to encompass a much broader and more integrated view of communications and how communicators connect, engage, and establish relationships with consumers, customers and other stakeholders on behalf on their clients. While public relations has predominantly focused on 'earned media' this new constituency of

audiences and the breadth of conversations and content it generates creates exponentially more touch points for strategic communication (Distaso & McCorkindale, 2012).

Gordon (2012) asserts public relations professionals value social media more than they actually use it. Notwithstanding, social media has changed the way organizations communicate. However, many public relations professionals and their firms are not measuring the impact of social media practices even though most public relations practitioners appreciate the need to measure who is talking about their organization or their clients' organizations in these outlets.

Social media offers corporation a wide range of engagement possibilities beyond Public Relations. Accordingly, some corporations use social media platforms for product marketing through advertising, where they promote brands, discuss features, and create awareness. In fact, advertising is the main scheme social media companies use to generate revenue stream to sustain their operation. In addition, social networking sites are used to spread information faster than traditional news outlets or any other form of media (Amdie, 2015).

The motivations for using social media for corporate communication are diverse, but the primary goal is to connect with the stakeholders and provide media and target audiences with more channels through which to interact with the organisation and its brands. Social media presents an important starting point for communicators seeking to transition the corporate narrative to these platforms and micro target the discussion. As a result of its interactive nature, social media is suitable for sustaining ongoing dialogue, and affording touch points and opportunities for media coverage (Gordon, 2010).

2.5 Social media and External Communication

External communication is a very important corporate communication element. It is crucial for creating brand image and identity. External communication is the exchange of information and message between an organization and other organizations, groups and individual outside its formal structure (Distaso & McCorkindale, 2012). Put simply, it is the kind of communication that takes place outside the organization. External communication is the contrast of internal communication which refers to the forms of communication that take place within the organisation.

External communication is about building the company's reputation. It is a form of strategic communication purposed to help build relationships. As a result companies usually use formal channels such as press releases, brochure, advertisements and product orders among others for external communication. This kind of communication is almost always formal and controlled since the companies want to control its image and its ability to maintain good relationships (Wright & Hinson, 2009).

In today's digital world, social media has become an increasingly important corporate communications channel for building a connection between companies and their publics (internal and external). For instance, Facebook, has about 1.9 billion users around the world, nearly a fifth of the world's population. This is an unprecedented opportunity for communicators to help their companies better understand, learn and share information instantaneously making the world look more like a small village. Unfortunately, despite the vast potential social media bring, many companies seem focused on social media primarily as a one-way promotional channel and have yet to use them effectively particularly for external communication (Young, Regan & Jonas, 2010).

Social media can be an effective tool for conveying crises information and explain current issues to external publics. Various types of social media play different roles with one main purpose, which is to disseminate information on an urgent basis and share it with a wide range of people usually outside the organisation. The use of social media for external communication is to reduce any potential tarnishing of the company's image, something which can easily occur as a result of poor communication with the public (Shuhada & Naidu, 2016).

According to Vasquez and Velez (2011) social media is conceived today in the corporate communication landscape as a strategic partner, driving new and unique possibilities for organizations to engage external stakeholders in conversations. Using social media for external communication has become crucial because we are witnesses of a new digital era where consumers are becoming active users rather than passive individuals, changing dramatically how society operates. As such, these useful technological platforms are employed widely and precisely by corporations in order to facilitate and improve communications with different categories of stakeholders including those outside the organisation.

2.7 Social Media use in the Hospitality Industry

Hospitality and tourism have emerged as major economic contributors and sources of social and environmental change since the 1950s. The patterns of tourism and hospitality development in different parts of the world reflect the histories and cultures of those areas and regions, but hospitality is a nearly universal phenomenon. It is an important source of wealth for many nations as it creates employment and generates foreign exchange. The significance of hospitality, has increased over years along with the diverse functions of tourism in the world (Benea, 2014; Lim, 1998).

As one of the determinants of success in hospitality establishments as well as all types of other organizations, strategic communication is the fundamental condition which enables coordination of organizational functioning. Communication effectiveness is even crucial for service sector industries such as hospitality and tourism. This is because if sufficient importance is not placed on effective communication in hospitality organizations, it may not be possible, for example, for people to have better relationships within that organization (Benea, 2014).

In spite of the strong association between hospitality and tourism, the two can be separated. Hospitality is a subsection of tourism. It is a fundamental part of the domestic and inbound leisure market. Consistent demand for tourism allows the hospitality industry to forecast demand and identify opportunities to increase consumer spend, creating a wave of secondary financial impacts (Robinson, Lück and Smith, 2013). The hospitality industry has two main sectors: the accommodation sector and the Food and Beverage (F&B) sector.

Tourism and hospitality are grounded in service provision and hence communication is key to the success of companies in these industries. Lim (1998) notes that the internet and associated technologies have led to a revolution in media in terms of reaching and sharing information in every area of life. Under the current trend of mass media growth, it is possible for a simple video camera and an internet access to cause the national and even international balances to change, depending on the importance of shared information.

The companies in the hospitality industry such as hotels, restaurants, recreational centres and transport companies can and do take advantage of the deluge of social media platforms available. Social media is relatively new and its abundant advantages are yet to be fully

explored by many companies in the industry. However, through social media, hospitality companies can for instance interact with consumers before, during, and after their vacation experience. It is also affordable, it has potential to send information viral (Verma, Stock & McCarthy, 2012)

Branding and external communication usually top the list as the reasons why hospitality companies join social media. A brand that stands out means an idea which customers will talk about and share. Therefore, hospitality companies leverage the power of social media to make their brands relevant, up-to-date, easy to understand, distinct from others and accessible. Hospitality companies using more than one social media also try to be consistent across all social media platforms used, this gives external stakeholders the feeling connectedness to the brand (Seyitoglu, 2015).

Well executed social media strategies for hospitality companies may lead to brand awareness among external stakeholders and consequently to customer loyalty and ultimately business success. Nevertheless, it is not enough to create a strong brand without keeping an eye on the reputation, also called brand monitoring (Verma, Stock & McCarthy, 2012). Increasing sales whilst keeping the costs as low as possible is what defines any business and the tourism and hospitality industry is not an exception to the norm. It suffices that social media use in hospitality industry is expected to help advance the goals of company.

Companies in the hospitality industry also use social media to engage customers and clients in dialogue to recognize their needs. The social media activities of hospitality companies can influence the way consumers think and react to services offered by the company. It therefore essential for hospitality companies to have a strong social media engagement strategy to ensure

they are connecting with customers and other relevant stakeholders that can help grow their businesses.

2.8 Overview of the Hospitality industry in Ghana

The hospitality industry is large and well-functioning in all advanced economies. In developing and emerging economies, the hospitality industries are equally fledging and growing although there are notable exceptions. The hospitality industry is a comprehensive list of all of the things that someone visiting an area would need. The hospitality industry in Ghana includes Food and beverage (Restaurants, stores, and bars) and Hotels (bed and breakfast lodges, hostels, and rental condos). This can also be extended to include companies in the tourism industry such as parks, transport systems, heritage sights, natural sites, cultural museums, theatre, and other sites unique to Ghana (Hiamey, 2012).

Ghana's hospitality industry has seen tremendous growth in the last few years (Hiamey, 2012). Ghana is strategically located on the West Coast of Africa near Cote D'Ivoire and Togo. Although the country has a good economy, aspects of the hospitality industry are rather expensive, especially hotels and flights. However, since there are a lot of international travellers who fly into Ghana for training and meetings, hospitality is serious business in Ghana (Hiamey, 2012).

One of the main reasons for the growth in the hospitality business is the growth of other sectors such as the mining industry in Ghana. Workers who are coming to Ghana to work in the local mines are starting to look for food and entertainment in these areas, which is creating a spin-off business boom. The natural resource mining has brought wealth domestically, creating a larger middle class. Other reasons why this industry have taken off are the stable government and economy, which infers more safety, and the growing middle class in Ghana. Due to the

tourism and the ability for growth, large hotel chains like Marriott and Radisson opened hotels last year (2016) in Ghana, with other chains looking at opening hotels in the coming years (Hiamey, 2012).

Douglas (2015) observes that the hospitality industry in Ghana and other parts of Africa has seen huge growth around rising commercial centres and natural resource extraction, with many international brands - such as Radisson Blu, Four Seasons, Marriott and Protea Hotels - growing their footprint across the continent. Trends in Ghana's tourism industry are affected corresponding developments in the sub-region.

The current trend is a growing demand for mixed use developments. Mixed-use developments such as hotel attached to a shopping mall, for example. Often mixed-use developments can generate anywhere between 15%-20% more revenue than a stand-alone hotel. Another interesting dynamic in the regional industry that may likely affect the local market is the drive for conference facilities. National governments and other investors are looking at developing international convention centres as a means of attracting, and also stimulating, hotel demand.

2.9 Challenges of associated with the use of Social Media for External Communication

Social media is undeniably a powerful business tool, helping employers with everything from recruitment to employee engagement to communications. Despite the business pluses and other advantages of using social media for communication, the effective use of these sites and tools to communicate with and engage external stakeholders is hampered by a number difficulties (Holtzhausen, 2005).

Thurman (2008) observes that given the emergent nature of social media, relatively few organisations actually have a formalised set of policies to guide their own efforts, as well as for others to draw on or learn from. This situation makes it very challenging for organisations to make the most out of social media. Generally, guidelines provide advice on how best to use social media tools to achieve a desired result, such as eliciting stakeholder engagement or providing suggestions for creating interesting content. Policies, on the other hand, represent official positions that govern the use of social media by designated communicators in the organisation, such as detailing what constitutes acceptable use or outlining official processes for gaining access to social media sites (Holtzhausen, 2005). The absence of social media policy and guideline is like communicating with no objective or plan.

Attracting and recruiting good savvy social media specialists is another issue for corporations. Social media is fast evolving industry requiring expertise, flexibility and passion for continuous discovery. However, technical knowledge about social media is to a certain extent, defined by age. The younger generation, the 'digital native', is typically below thirty years of age and has an instinctive understanding of digital. But they do not, unsurprisingly, possess the experience, all-round communications skills, gravitas and credibility required of senior operators (Holtzhausen, 2005; Humphreys, 2010). This makes it difficult for organisations to find experts with the right blend of technological agility and masterful corporate communication gravitas.

Additionally, social media may serve as a potential outlet for negative comments about the organization. Though the uses of social media improves external communication by incorporating elements of relational and dialogic communication there in a central problem of control when using social media for corporate communication. The nature and structure of social media is such that users can publish content with little or no restriction (Humphreys,

2010). This implies that anyone can peddle falsehood, malign or promote negative perceptions about corporate brands and individuals on social media.

Also, many senior management do not understand the structure and operations of social media enough to give it necessary political and budgetary support. Senior management who are usually matured (over 30) struggle to make sense of the new digital world, hence do not give social media their full support. This situation is unfortunately replicated both in communications teams and in the boardroom, creating a generational and cultural barrier to understanding and integrating digital communications in today's organisations (Thurman, 2008). Meanwhile, communication whether online or offline requires the buy-in of all important decision makers in the organisation.

Being on social media also means that organisations have to necessarily operate within the value system of social media, this sometimes leads to conflicting values. Strategic communication management includes recognition that organizational survival means that organizations must adhere to the dominant value systems of the environments in which they operate (Holtzhausen, 2005), these values can be radical and contrary to organisational values. Notwithstanding, organisations using social media for external communication need to comply with social expectations and values.

Furthermore, the legal structure of social media also presents an important challenge for effective external communication. Information published by a company can now be copied, amended, edited and forwarded by others at will. How best to engage in this 'lawless' and unstructured environment is a mystery for many organisations. The legal consequences if employees use social media sites to view or distribute objectionable, illicit or offensive material

are also not clear. Besides, social media is transnational and this also raises jurisdictional issues with regard to the prosecution of offenders for inappropriate use of copyright material (Humphreys, 2010).

2.10 Measures for the Effective Use of Social media for External Communication

Social media has great potential for effectively communicating with external stakeholders. If used appropriately, social media can strengthen trust between organisations and their stakeholders. However, if used inappropriately it may create distrust and could result in reputational loss (Holtzhausen, 2005). It is therefore incumbent on hospitality organisations to familiarise themselves with strategies of using social media effectively whilst circumventing the challenges identified.

To begin with, organisations on social media ought to have clear objectives for social media and these must be drawn from the organisation's broad communication goals. Specifically, the practice of undertaken organizational social media communication without clear objectives and without integration of social media with other organizational communication activities must be eschewed. Although many organisations fail at this because of the relative newness of social media, the democratization of social media makes it essential to have objectives against which to measure Key Performance Indicators (Hermida & Thrumann, 2008).

Further, developing a social media policy can be an important first step for organisations using social media and can ultimately serve as a key enabler for responsibly and effectively leveraging social media tools. Social media researchers (Schultz & Peltier, 2013) advocated that both public and private sector organizations should have well defined social media strategy and argued that, while policies and guidelines inform who is authorized to speak

on what, when and how within organizations, a strategy should include overall objectives, Key Performance Indicators (KPIs), an outline of measurement methods and explain how social media communication is integrated with other corporate and organizational communication.

Another issue of particular concern but often overlooked is the monitoring of social media activities. Monitoring of social media content should be considered an essential component of environmental scanning, tracking and measurement. Unfortunately in most organisations, reporting is only patchily undertaken with regard to social media. Organisations must invest in tools or services that can help them monitor all social media mentions of the organization and its products or services (O'sullivan & Heinonen, 2008).

Related to monitoring of content is the need to analyse conversations about the corporation on social media. Social media, content analysis can be undertaken to identify the issues and topics being discussed, sources quoted, and the tone of content—that is, whether it is positive or negative for the organization (O'sullivan & Heinonen, 2008). This same technique can also be used to identify influencers and goodwill ambassadors that can influence stakeholders' perceptions about the organisation in online communities. Knowing this, organisations can now craft their messages targeted at particular external stakeholder groups.

Macnamara & Zerfass (2012) caution organisations using social media for external communication to do so from the approach of reflective thinking and educational role. Reflective thinking involves viewing an organisation from the outside, or public view. Reflective communication management and educational role perspective help communicators for the organisation become sensitive to social demands and expectations and to become communicatively competent to respond appropriately to those social demands. These

approaches to communication management are particularly applicable to social media in the service industry and could be beneficially adopted in other industries (Macnamara & Zerfass, 2012).

Moreover, although communication symmetry has long been a stated goal of public relations and corporate communication, interactive social media place additional demands on organizations in relation to the number of voices that are allowed to speak for and about the organization and require increased capacity for community engagement and listening. Suffice to say, participation on social media must involve openness and community on one hand and effectiveness in representing organizational interests and achieving organizational objectives on the other (Hermida & Thrumman, 2008).

Last but not least, education of PR and corporate communication practitioners in social media practices, not simply the technologies, is an important step towards achieving effective external communication on social media. This is important because in spite of the strong interest in social media and claims for intermediate to advanced knowledge and skills among PR and corporate communication practitioners, there is need for continuous training of employees in planning, monitoring, and evaluation in relation to social media (Eltantawy & Weist, 2011; Macnamara & Zerfass, 2012).

2.10 Theoretical framework

This section focuses on the theoretical explanations on the use of social media for external communication in the hospitality industry. The systems theory of public relations was used as potential explanation of the phenomenon understudied.

2.10.1 Systems Theory of Communication

Proposed by Ludwig von Bertalanffy in 1928, a biologist, the Systems theory was originally in the domain of natural scientists. However, the theory has been extended to mass communication, organisational studies and other social science disciplines. The systems theory of communications has been used in communication research and practice since the early 1950's (Grossman, 2016).

A system can be defined as a group of elements organized in a specific manner that interact with each other to function as a whole (Meadows, 2008). Systems work with greater efficiency, accuracy, and positive structure when self-organization, hierarchy and resilience are present (Mangal, 2013). Systems theory is often used in communication research, with parallels being drawn between systems and how communication is practised.

Systems theory of communication holds that analyzing an entity as part of a larger whole or system is beneficial in determining the proper course of action for said entity. Grossman (2016) posits that a large part of understanding systems theory is the self-correcting feedback loop that an entity goes through when adhering to the principles of systems theory. This concept can be easily related to public relations when keeping in mind the rest of the theory, that an organization must be evaluated as one part of an interdependent whole. For example, if a public relations team launches a campaign meant to further the goals of its organization, it must consider how its stakeholders (internal and external), the intended audience, and the media will perceive the campaign.

The system's relationship with the environment is often used a point of definition. Systems, on a high level, are divided into two broad categories; open systems and closed systems. At the

very base level – an open system interacts in some way with its environment while a closed system does not – it is closed to the environment. In social science there are obviously no systems that are absolutely closed as there is always some level of interactions with the environment (Mangal, 2013).

In mass communication systems that have a relatively limited set of interactions with their environments are often termed as closed systems. While those with a high level of interdependence with their environment are considered open systems. It is important for communication systems to operate as open systems accepting feedback for self-correction and improvement (Grossman, 2016).

2.10.2 Systems Theory and Social Media

Systems have subsystems or miniature elements that also function by themselves as systems but are integrated into the broader communication system. This study considers social media as a subsystem in an organisation's communication system that helps in furthering corporate communication goals. As a subsystem, social media is essential for obtaining feedback in order to ensure that the organisation functions well. A functionalist approach is adopted for this investigation and this implies the evaluation of the role the subsystem (social media) fulfils in the larger system.

Systems theory of communication requires that public relations professionals examine their organization as one part of a larger whole that is interdependent on its stakeholders and publics for success. When using this perspective, public relations teams can tailor their actions to satisfy the wants and needs of the system in which they reside (Gregorry, 2000; Meadows,

2008). Thus, the communication approaches used on social media as a subsystem must be appropriate for the context.

According to Mangal (2013) the world of work today communicates through the internet and Social media has become the dominant shared characteristic on the Internet, with an estimated 49.3% of the top 10,000 websites in the world having links social networking sites. That is to say social networking sites are by themselves communication networks, and all online websites and forms of social media can be considered systems.

Again, social networking sites can be considered even as complex systems on their own. For example Facebook is an integrated platforms that combines many media and information and communication technologies, such as webpage, webmail, digital image, digital video, discussion group, guest book and connection list or search engine. Many of these technologies are social network tools themselves. Noticing this, Gregory (2000) quipped that systems theory thinking is recommended for the breaking down of organisational barriers and current and potential uses of new media to demonstrate the inadequacies of the older approaches and the applicability of the new models.

The systems theory was applied in this study to understand how social media is deployed for external communication. This theory thus evaluated how social media is used as subsystem to advance the corporate communication goals of La Palm Royal Beach Hotel. The theory is suitable first because social media itself is networked as a system and also because the functionalist approach makes it possible to examine the use and contribution of social media to external communication.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the methodology employed to conduct the study. This includes information on the research design, sampling technique and the data collection and analysis procedures among others.

3.2 Research Design

The single case study design was used for this study. This design emanates from the qualitative research approach. The qualitative research approach is constructivist and inductive in nature (Creswell, 2003). This research approach enables social science researchers to study a particular phenomenon or culture in-depth because it is flexible and offers opportunity for deeper understanding of the issues under investigation (Yin, 2012).

Single case study designs involve investigating one case in much detail. In this study, the single case study design allowed for in-depth exploration of the impact of social media on external communication at La Palm Royal Beach Hotel. The single case study design is suitable for studies that seek to focus on singular study sites for the purpose of immersion in the field and close examination of study subjects in their natural environment (Creswell, 2003). Single case study design was suitable for this study because the detailed qualitative accounts often produced in case studies not only help to explore phenomena in real-life environment, but also help to explain the complexities of using social media for external communication.

The case study design gave the researcher the opportunity to obtain useful information from various categories of respondents in their natural setting, covering situations that could not have been captured through experimental or typical survey research.

The design also facilitated thorough gathering of detailed information in the field using a combination of tools. This significantly contributed to the accuracy and reliability of the research as the different data collection techniques augmented the weaknesses inherent in the individual techniques as Yin (2012) suggested.

3.3 Population of the study

The population of a study is the aggregate or totality of all the elements, subjects or members that conform to a set of specifications. There are two classifications of population in research, namely; target population and accessible population (Nworgu, 2006). Target population is used in reference to all elements of group that the study seeks to investigate. The accessible population also refers to members of the population that are within the reach of the research (Nworgu, 2006). The researcher used both targeted and accessible population in this study.

The target population for this study consisted of all external publics and staff of La Palm Royal Beach Hotel. This population was suitable for the study because external communication flows from the organisations staff to outside publics and vice versa. However, it was not practicable for the current study to consider all employees and all external publics of La Palm Royal Beach Hotel. In the light of this, the accessible population was instead used for the study. The assessable population was staffs and management of La Palm Royal Beach who are knowledgeable about the organisation's interactions with external publics. Key external publics such as the Hotel's clients, partners and industry regulators were also part of the study.

3.4 Sampling

Sampling refers to the selection part of the population to represent the entire population. Sampling is necessary because it is usually impracticable to study the entire population in many studies (Kusi, 2012).

When conducting a qualitative research convenience is always a principle in sampling (Dawson, 2002). Following from this a non-probability sampling technique was used to select respondents who were readily available and had the required information to contribute to the study. Marshall (1996) explained that non-random sampling strategies are suitable for qualitative studies because such studies do not seek to generalise but to develop an understanding of complex issues relating to human behaviour.

The purposive sampling technique was used to select sixty (60) respondents to participate in the study. The purposive sampling technique involves the selection of respondents based on predetermined criteria (Marshall, 1996). This technique is also called the judgment sampling technique. The respondents for this study were selected based on their availability, knowledge and experiences with regard to the communication activities of La Palm on social media. In that, fifty (50) employees of the organisation who worked in client facing departments (communication and marketing) of the organisation were selected to participate in the study by responding to questionnaires. In depth interviews were also held with two (2) management members of the organisation. The selected management because of their depth of knowledge about the organisation's overall corporate communication. Most importantly, eight (8) key publics comprising of individual and corporate clients, partners, suppliers and industry regulators were also selected for in-depth interview.

3.5 Data collection

Primary data for this study was gathered using semi-structured questionnaires and interviews guides.

3.5.1 Semi Structured Questionnaire

Questionnaire refers to a set of open or close ended questions designed to solicit specific information for a study. However, semi-structured questionnaires entail standardized close ended and open ended questions which give respondents the opportunity to respond to simple questions either by writing direct answers or by selecting options from a list of responses (Kusi, 2012).

Semi-structured questionnaires used for this study consisted of closed or prompted questions with predefined answers as well as open ended questions. The researcher had to anticipate possible answers with pre-coded responses for some questions whilst leaving others open for respondents to write freely. This type of questionnaire is popular with quantitative studies but is also useful for some case studies (Creswell, 2014). The semi-structured questionnaires used for this study were designed by the researcher based on the objectives and scope of the study. The strengths of this data collection tool lies in the ease of subjecting such data to statistical analysis because the information collected is already organised. Respondents also feel more comfortable responding to questionnaires with both predetermined answers and solicited responses (Kusi, 2012). This notwithstanding, questionnaires are also restrictive as they do not allow respondents the opportunity to flow or express themselves in their own words in most cases. Semi-structured questionnaires were used for this study because of the need to obtain

specific information from a large number of respondents (Dawson, 2002). This instrument also fulfils the quest to gather data using different tools and techniques.

3.5.2 Interview

In-depth interviews were conducted to obtain data from management members and key publics of La Palm Royal Beach Hotel. All interviews were face to face. Lindlof and Taylor (2002) posit that the interpretivist tradition in which qualitative studies are situated is mainly concerned with oral discourse or interview. Interviews were suitable because the intent was to obtain detailed information about the impact of social media on external communication. In addition, the use of interviews also encouraged respondents to freely express their interests and experiences. The researcher developed interview guides based on the objectives of the study. A digital recorder was used to record all interviews but with respondents prior consent. The interviews lasted for 15 to 20 minutes on average.

3.6 Data analysis procedure

The analysis of data for this study was on two levels because the study used a variety of data collection techniques to firm up the findings. Quantitative data collected through the use of questionnaires was analysed descriptively via a computer software-Statistical Package for Social Scientists (SPSS). Prior to this, the researcher coded all questionnaire responses manually and entered them into the data analysis software. The descriptive analysis helped to organize the data into frequency tables, summations and percentages which were later illustrated with diagrams.

The interviews were analysed using the thematic analysis technique. The recorded interviews were played back and transcribed manually. After the transcription, the researcher did a close

reading of the text paying attention to issues that border on the research questions and objectives. The dominant issues and patterns identified were collapsed into themes, and the themes were used for the analysis.

CHAPTER FOUR

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

4.1 Introduction

This chapter contains the findings and discussions of the study. These findings were analysed to address the research questions of the study. The findings of the study are presented in tables and figures, where necessary, verbatim quotes are also provided to buttress the analysis.

The findings of the study are arranged to satisfy the research questions. For emphasis, the research questions of the study are herein restated;

1. What social media platforms are used in La-Palm Royal Beach Hotel?
2. How are these social media platforms used in communicating with external public?
3. How effective are these social media platforms in external communication?
4. What are the challenges associated with the use of social media platforms as communication tools?

4.2 Demographic Characteristics of respondents

This study involved questionnaire administration and interviews with staff, clients and management of La Palm Royal Beach Hotel in Accra. In all, 50 questionnaires were administered, out of this 48 were properly completed for analysis. Two management members and five external stakeholders of the hotel were also interviewed. The demographic characteristics of respondents presented here particularly pertains to the 48 staff of the hotel. The demographic features of focus in this study are gender, age, department, and the length of time for which respondents have served the hotel.

4.2.1 Gender Distribution of Respondents

The gender distribution of respondents is displayed in Table 1.

Table 1: Gender Distribution of Respondents

GENDER	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE
MALE	32	67
FEMALE	16	33
TOTAL	48	100

Source: Field Data (2017)

It would be observed from the gender distribution that male staff dominated the sample, there were 67% males and 33% females. The gender distribution of participants implies that more men than women participated in the study and hence the perspectives expressed on the use of social media in external communication reflect the thoughts of a particular gender. However, this does not make the study results skewed because of similarities in the use of social media by females and males.

4.2.2 Age Distribution of respondents

Table 2: Age Distribution of Respondents

AGE	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE
19-29 years	12	25
30-39 years	24	50
40-49 years	12	25
Total	48	100

Source: Field Data (2017)

The age distribution displayed in Table 2 shows that majority of staff were 30-39 years of age, the respondents were 24 in number and accounted for 50% of the sample. Also, 25% of respondents were 19 -29 years, another 25% were 40-49 years of age. The departments in which respondents worked is illustrated in Table 2.

Table 3: Departmental Representation

Department	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE
Sales and Marketing	16	34
Information Technology (IT)	8	17
Concierge	4	8
Reception	4	8
Food and beverages	4	8
Finance and Administration	12	25
Total	48	100

Source: Field Data (2017)

It can be seen from Table 3 that respondents were drawn from different departments of the organisation. However, majority (34%) worked in the Sales and marketing department, 25% were from the Finance and Administration whilst 17% were worked in Information Technology (IT). Additionally, the following departments; Reception, Food and beverages and Concierge were each represented by 8% of respondents. The departmental representation is indicative that there is representation from different categories of staff, it thus ensures that the views outcomes of the study are balanced.

4.2.3 Length of Service

The period of time for which respondents have worked with the organisation is presented in Table 4.

Table 4: Length of Service

Length of service	Frequency	Percentage
Less than one year	12	25
One to three years	8	17
Three to five years	4	8
More than five years	24	50
Total	48	100

Source: Field Data (2017)

Table 4 shows that most respondents 50% had worked with La Palm Royal Beach for more than five years, 25% had worked with the hotel for less than one year, 17% for one to three years and 8% for three to five years.

Interview respondents

The seven (7) interview respondents also consisted of 5 males and 2 females. In order to keep the identity of respondents anonymous, their names are withheld, and alphanumeric codes were instead used to present their verbatim responses. In that, the response of the first and second managers are coded as MG-1 and MG-2. That of the five key external publics was also coded EP-1, EP - 2 and so on.

4.3 Research Question One: What social media platforms are used at La-Palm Royal Beach Hotel?

The first research question sought to find out the social media platforms used by La-Palm Royal Beach Hotel. This research question was addressed through questionnaire administration among staff and interviews with management.

It was found out that the organisation uses different social media, the different social media used by the hotel are illustrated in Figure 1 based on the responses of staff.

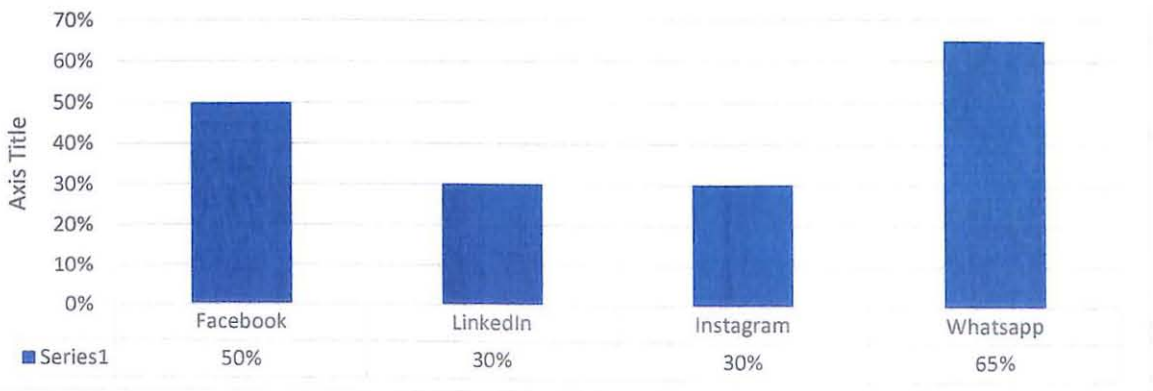


Figure 1: Social Media Used at La-Palm Royal Beach Hotel
Source: Field Data (2017)

It can be seen from Figure 1 that many respondents selected more than one social media. However, majority 65% claimed that the hotel relies on WhatsApp for communication, 50% also indicated that the organisation used Facebook whilst 30% were aware of the organisation's use of either Instagram or LinkedIn.

Interviews were also conducted with management in order to confirm the questionnaire responses. In this regard, it was found out that managers were well aware of all the social media channels identified by staff.

Commenting on why La Palm Royal Beach Hotel is on social media, a manager stated in the past few years, social media has begun playing a more integral role in the marketing and communications strategy of hotels and hotel brands. There's a customer-service component that's really taken hold on social media and so many inquiries that can take place across social media channels, making it a big reason for hotels to become more active on social media. But we are selective so we are on Facebook and Instagram, we also use WhatsApp but this is not very official.

Another management member explained in a separate interview that: Currently we use different social media depending on what we want to achieve. So we are on Facebook, Instagram and LinkedIn. We use WhatsApp as well but that is for staff and sometimes clients that we are familiar with. As I said, depending on our message and target or what we want to achieve we can use any of these, but we use some more often than others (Verbatim Response of MG-2).

The findings of the study regarding the first research question shows that social media is considered as an important part of external communication mechanisms at La Palm Royal Beach Hotel. Management and staff of the hotel indicated that various social media platforms are utilised by the organisation to interact with its publics. The study revealed that Facebook, Instagram, WhatsApp and LinkedIn are the social media sites used by the hotel.

The use of multiple communication social media by La-Palm Royal Beach Hotel demonstrates the growing importance of internet and virtual communication in doing business as suggested by Gileman (2006). Gileman (2006) opined new media clusters like Facebook and LinkedIn and virtual environments have become online meeting spaces where users, or members of the public can interact and express themselves. New media spaces give people a way to identify themselves (through personal profile) and different means of communication ranging from text and voice chat to public message boards and/or private messaging.

However, whilst social media vary in the extent to which they incorporate new information and communication tools, such as mobile connectivity, blogging, and photo or video-sharing, the social media used at La Palm Royal Beach Hotel are similar in function. Facebook and WhatsApp particularly support the maintenance of pre-existing social networks, but can also help strangers connect based on shared interests, political views, or activities. LinkedIn and Instagram however cater to diverse audiences as suggested by Boyd and Ellison (2008). LinkedIn is for establishing and maintaining professional contacts whilst Instagram is mainly for photo sharing.

The social media used by La Palm Royal Beach Hotel are also among the most popular social media according to (Chaffey, 2016; Stelzner, 2016). This means that the hotel will be able to

reach a lot of people using the combination of the various social media identified. Suffice to say the use of Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn and WhatsApp are suitable for the needs of the organisation. When deployed tactfully, these social media can help the hotel to improve service marketing through advertising, brand promotion, and in creating awareness as observed by (Amdie, 2015; Distaso & McCorkindale, 2012).

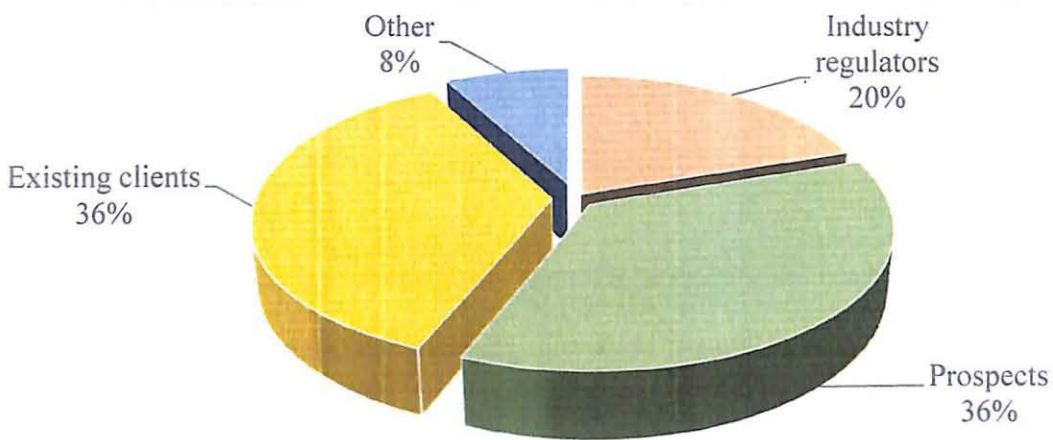
Additionally, the use of multiple social media suitable for the hotel's purpose also gives it the opportunity to use new media for external communication. This is because social media has great potential for effectively communicating with external stakeholders. If used appropriately, social media can strengthen trust between organisations and their stakeholders. However, if used inappropriately it may create distrust and could result in loss of reputation (Holtzhausen, 2005). That is, the decision to use particular social media is only a first step as more needs to be done by the hotel to obtain the benefits of social media use for external communication. In the light of this, the second research question investigated how the organisation uses social media for external communication.

4.4 Research Question Two: How are these social media platforms used in communicating with external publics?

The second research question is a build-up of the first as it sought to ascertain how the identified social media are used by the hotel to communicate with its external publics. This research question was addressed from the organisational perspective. That is, it was addressed based on the responses of staff and management obtained through questionnaire administration and interviews.

First of all, it was found out that the hotel had different categories of external stakeholders with whom it communicates using social media. Staff respondents identified three main external publics with whom the hotel communicates using social media. Responses regarding the external publics with whom the hotel communicates using social media is presented in Figure 2.

Figure 2: Categories of external publics communicated to through social media
Source: Field Data, (2017).



It is evidenced in Figure 2 that, majority 36% of respondents claimed that social media is often used in communication with existing clients. An equal proportion of respondents 36% claimed that social media is used for communicating with prospects. Additionally, 20% and 8% of respondents indicated that social media is used for communicating with Industry regulators and other (suppliers, tour operators and partners) categories of respondents.

Further, staff of the hotel were required to select from a list of descriptors the one that most suitably describes how social media is used in communicating with external publics. The responses in this regard are presented in Figure 3.

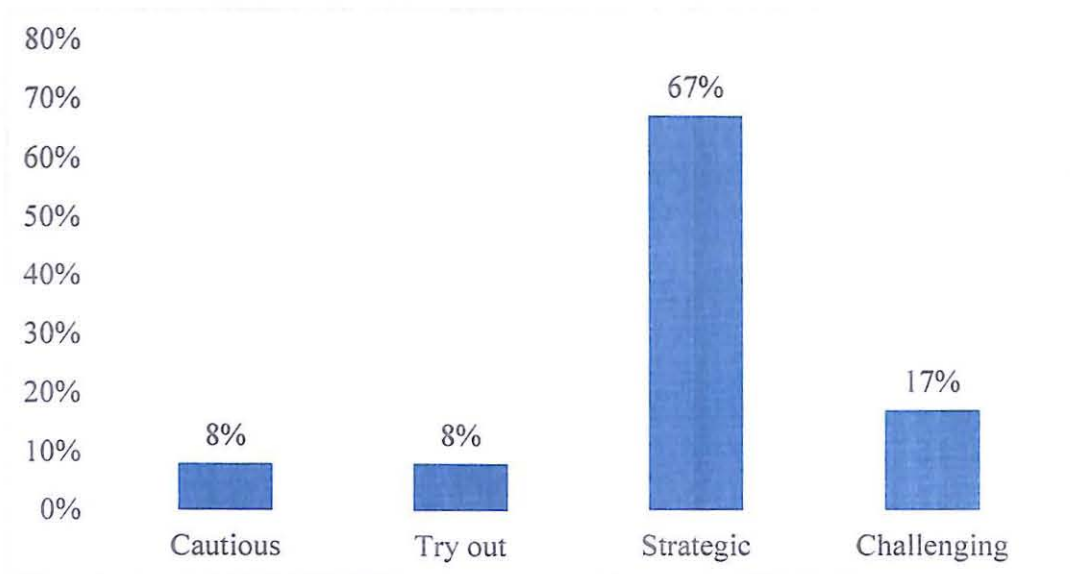


Figure 3: Description of Social Media use
 Source: Field data (2017)

It can be seen from Figure 3 that majority 67% of respondents described the organisation's use of social media as strategic, 17% considered it challenging and an equal number of respondents 8% considered it either cautious or based on Try-out.

The researcher probed further to understand whether the organisation had codified social media policy, strategy, and guidelines. The existence and use of these describes the nature of social media use in the organisation. In Figure 4, the responses on the existence of social media policy, strategy and guideline are juxtaposed.

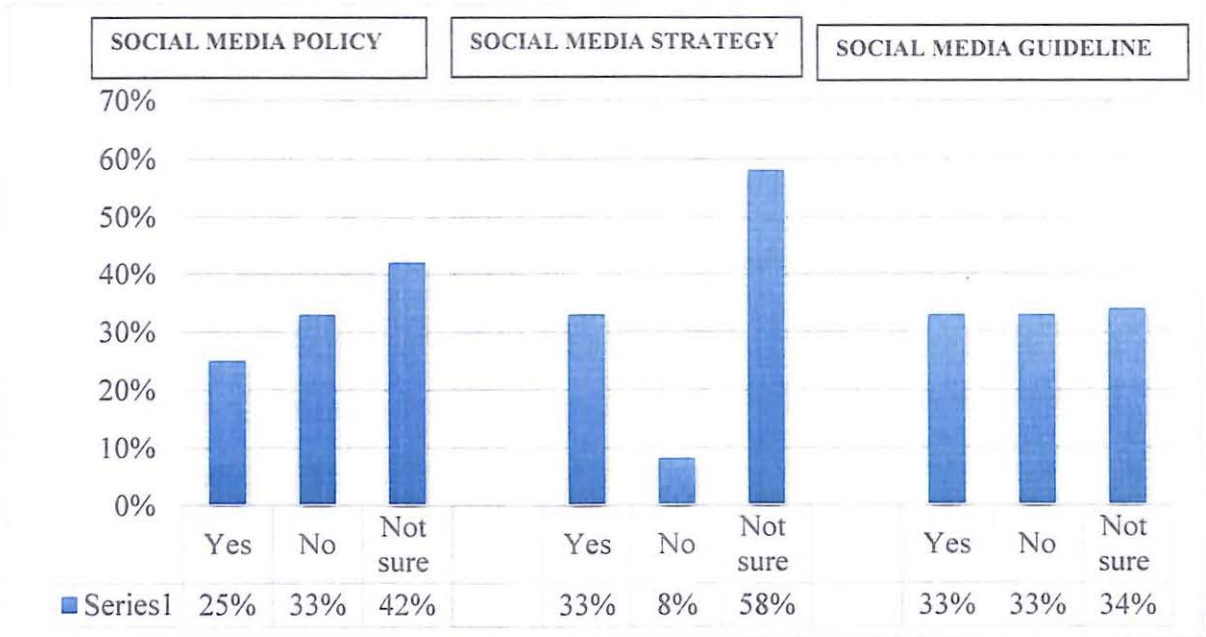


Figure 4: Social media Policy, Strategy and Guideline at La-Palm Royal Beach Hotel
Source: Field Data, (2017).

As illustrated in Figure 4, the perspectives of staff varied with regard to the existence of codified social media policy, strategy and guideline at La-Palm Royal Beach Hotel. Taken together, most respondents are not sure about the existence of these documents (social media policy, strategy, and guideline).

Regarding Social Media Policy, most respondents 42% indicated that they are unsure about the availability of such a document in the organisation, 33% claimed that the organisation had no such document, but 25% claimed that such a document existed. Similarly, more than half 58% of respondents claimed that they are unaware of the availability or otherwise of a social media policy at La-Palm Royal Beach Hotel, 33% of respondent indicated that such a document is available but 8% stated that there is no social media policy in existence. Respondents were again divided regarding the availability of social media guideline at the hotel, majority 34% were unsure if the hotel had such a document.

The interviews with management clarified and corroborated the responses of staff in many respects. In explaining how social media is used to communicate with external stakeholders, management members explained that the use of social media is strategic but flexible.

A management member commented;

We don't use social media in isolation. It is part of our overall communication mechanism and we make sure we make the most of Facebook, Instagram and the likes by deploying them strategically to complement traditional means of communication (Verbatim response of MG-2).

Another manager quipped:

You see, social media on its own is broad and it also keeps changing. As a result our approach to it has also been changing. We have one comprehensive communication policy and this informs how we manage social media whether Facebook or LinkedIn. So it's not cast in brass, it's very flexible in order to allow our account managers the freedom of creativity (Verbatim response of MG-1).

Commenting on the existence or the availability of social media policy, strategy and guideline, one manager stated that;

The social media landscape is still evolving. At the moment we use that to compliment traditional media so we have just one communication policy that captures our entire communication profile which includes social media. We have a strategy for social media, we also have guidelines like dos and don'ts but these are usually discussed with just the account managers (Verbatim response MG-2).

Overall, the findings with regard to the second research question shows that social media at La Palm Royal beach hotel is first of all targeted at clients, prospects and partners. The

organisation has reportedly taken to a strategic approach of social media management, but opinions are divided over the existence of a codified social media policy, strategy and guideline. The contention is not problematic considering the fact that the organisation has a codified communication policy which informs the approach to social media in the absence of a separate policy for social media.

The practice of social media at La-Palm Royal Beach Hotel is not consistent with best practices as posited by (Hermida & Thrumman, 2008). In the view of the researchers (Hermida & Thrumman, 2008) organisations on social media ought to have clear objectives for social media, which must be drawn from the organisation's broad communication goals.

Hermida and Thrumman (2008) specifically make a case that the practice of carrying out organizational social media communication without clear objectives and without integration of social media with other organizational communication activities must be eschewed. Many organisations fail at this because of the relative newness of social media, but the democratization of social media makes it essential to have objectives against which to measure Key Performance Indicators. Eltantawy and Weist (2011) also agree to the intentional and aligned use of social media as they argued that corporate communication practitioners must go beyond seeing social media as just technologies but rather as important communication tools that must be managed based on organisational philosophy and communication goals.

However, the fact that La Palm Royal Beach hotel does not have a clear codified social media policy and strategy could impinge the effective use of social media for external communication. Following from this, Schultz and Peltier (2013) advocated for public and private sector organizations to have well defined social media strategy and argued that, while policies and

guidelines inform who is authorized to speak on what, when and how within organizations, a strategy should include overall objectives, Key Performance Indicators (KPIs), an outline of measurement methods and explain how social media communication is integrated with other corporate and organizational communication.

The position of Schultz and Peltier (2013) is a long held perspective by social media researchers as Hermida and Thrumann (2008) specifically posit that the practice of undertaking organizational social media communication without clear objectives and without integration of social media with other organizational communication activities must be eschewed. In spite of this, many organisations including La Palm Royal Beach Hotel fail to put this in practice because of the relative newness of social media. Meanwhile, the fluid nature of social media makes it even essential to have clear policies and objectives against which to measure Key Performance Indicators.

4.5 Research Question Three: How effective are these social media platforms in external communication?

The third research question probed the effectiveness of the social media tools used in communicating with external publics. This research question was addressed from the perspective of organisational members and key external publics of the organisation.

Staff of the hotel responded to questionnaires which required them to indicate the extent of the effectiveness of social media in terms of public engagement, obtaining feedback, business promotion, influencing perception, creating connections and lastly building brand awareness. These are notable derivatives of using social media for external communication that were

identified in literature. Each measure was assessed on a five-point likert type scale that rated 5- Extremely useful, 4-Useful, 3-Neither, 2-Not useful and 1-Disappointing.

Table 5: Effectiveness of social media

Effect	Extremely Useful	Useful	Somehow	Not useful
Engagement	42%	50%	8%	-
Feedback	17%	75%	8%	-
Promotion	25%	67%	8%	-
Influencing Perception	42%	42%	8%	8%
Connection	33%	58%	9%	-
Brand Awareness	25%	67%	8%	-

Source: Field data, (2017).

It can be seen from Table 5 that the views of respondents varied with respect to the effectiveness of social media in attaining specific external communication outcomes. Notably, engagement, promotion and feedback stand out and the areas in which social media has had the most significant effect according to respondents.

To begin with, majority of respondents, 75%, indicated that social media has been very useful for obtaining feedback from external publics, 17% claimed that it has been very useful but 8% indicated that it has been somehow useful. Also, 67% of respondents stated that social media has been useful for business promotion, 25% indicated that it has been extremely useful but 8% claimed that it did so somehow. Again, most respondents indicated that the adoption of social media at La-Palm Royal Beach Hotel is useful for creating brand awareness, 25% of staff responded that it has been extremely useful, but 8% indicated that it has been somehow useful. Moreover, 50% of staff responded that social media has been useful for engagement

with external publics, 42% indicated that it has been extremely useful, but 8% considered it somehow useful. It was realised that social media was also relied on for connecting the organisation to external stakeholders. There were 58% of respondents in whose view social media is useful for creating and maintaining connections, 33% found it extremely useful and 9% described it as somehow useful.

Meanwhile, social media is also suitable for influencing perceptions. There were 42% of respondents that indicated that social media is useful in this area, another 42% found it extremely useful, 8% of respondents considered it somehow useful, but another 8% described it as not useful.

Key external publics of the organisation also indicated in the interviews that the use of social media by La-Palm Royal Beach Hotel has been beneficial to both the organisation and external stakeholders. The external publics emphasised in separate interviews that social media has been very beneficial for relationship building with the hotel and also for keeping updated with the state of the hotel such as offerings, latest developments and pertinent news.

One member of the organisation's external public explained;

It [social media] has changed the way we relate, learn, have fun, and even affects how people chose to travel. Hotels like La Palm and others in the travel industry are finally beginning to understand that ways of focused approach to social media can help create a strong brand, allow a greater exposition worldwide and drive sales. Personally, following the Hotel on Facebook helps me to maintain contact because Facebook provides a perfect tool to interact directly with them [the hotel] (verbatim response of EP-3).

Further, another respondent explained how social media is beneficial for keeping up with the state and activities at La Palm Royal Beach Hotel.

The strong presence of La-Palm within social networks makes it possible for me to be constantly updated on their upcoming events, promotions, amenities and services. I know this is the same for a wide range of potential customers who follow the activities of the hotel because people are online all the time. Even though the social media communication of La-Palm could be better if the company invested more in that, I think they are doing fine with giving updates about special packages (Verbatim response of EP-1).

For other external publics, it is the opportunity of feedback that is the most effective use of social media at the hotel.

We hold programs here [at La Palm Royal Beach Hotel] every time so we are important partners if I may say so. For us, La-Palm uses social media well because every time we ask a question or post a comment, there is a response whether immediately or latter through emailing. Participants to our conferences also find it easy to locate the place because La-Palm is online so a lot of people know about the hotel or at least how to find it (verbatim response of EP-4).

The use of social media at La-Palm Royal Beach Hotel is effective in many respects. Particularly the organisation is effective in the use of social medial for business promotion, for obtaining feedback, ensuring engagement and also for brand awareness. Further to that, customers and prospects are also able keep updated on activities of the hotel through social media and also contact or connect with the hotel through these media. In essence, the use of

social media helps La-Palm to establish and maintain mutually beneficial relationship with the clients and partners, especially external publics.

The findings of the study show that social media enables La-Palm hotel and its external publics to stay in a loop, depictive of open systems, from a theoretical perspective. Open systems according to Grossman (2016) maintain high level of interdependence with their environment. It is important for communication systems to operate as open systems accepting feedback for self-correction and improvement. Based on this, the use of social media for external communication is effective for the opportunity it creates for feedback.

The findings of the study also affirm the report of Gregory's (2000) Systems Theory Thinking as a suitable for the breaking down of organisational barriers to communication. These current and other potential uses of new media also demonstrate the inadequacies of older approaches and the applicability of the new models.

Notwithstanding, social networking sites are complex sub systems on their own. For example Facebook which is used by the hotel is an integrated platforms that combines many media and information and communication technologies, such as webpage, webmail, digital image, digital video, discussion group, guest book and connection list or search engine. This makes it even more important to manage social media creatively but cautiously in order to obtain the most benefit.

Moreover, although open system communication has long been a stated goal of public relations and corporate communication, interactive social media place additional demands on organizations in relation to the number of voices that are allowed to speak for and about the organization and require increased capacity for community engagement and listening (Hermida

& Thruman, 2008). The effective use of social media thus require participation, openness and a sense of community on one hand and effectiveness in representing organizational interests and achieving organizational objectives on the other.

In the light of achieving organisational goals through social media Macnamara and Zerfass (2012) caution organisations using social media for external communication to do so from the approach of reflective thinking and educational role. This approach according to Macnamara and Zerfass (2012) involves viewing an organisation from the outside-in perspective. Suffice to say although the current approach used by the hotel is yielding some results such as creating opportunity for feedback, updating customers and building relationships, it is important to reimagine the use of social media for external communication in a manner that is more reflective of the needs of external publics. This will be useful in improving the level of effectiveness.

4.6 Research question 4: What are the challenges associated with the use of social media platforms as communication tools?

The use of social media can be very challenging for organisations. The fourth research question is concerned with the challenges associated with the use of social media at La-Palm Royal beach hotel. This research question was addressed from the organisational perspective. In that, staff respondents were required to indicate their extent of agreement or otherwise about the preponderance of different challenges of social media management.

The responses of staff to the preponderance of notable social media challenges is presented in Table 6.

Table 6: Challenges of Social Media at La-Palm

Challenges	Strongly	Agree	Neither	Disagree	Strongly
	Agree				Disagree
1. Inadequate content control	8%	33%	42%	17%	-
2. Unclear governance (guidelines)	50%	25%	25%	-	-
3. Legality/liability concerns	67%	25%	8%	-	-
4. Security threats	25%	33%	33%	8%	-
5. Inadequate expertise	33%	25%	42%	-	-
6. Budgetary concerns	8%	33%	50%	8%	-
7. Poor integration of social media and other external communication	17%	58%	8%	17%	-

Source: Field Data (2017)

It can be observed from Table 6 that the respondents identified with various challenges at varying degrees. The commonest challenge as can be seen from Table 4.6 is the concern of legal liability arising out of the use of social media. Most respondents (67%) strongly agreed to this, 25% agreed and 8% neither agreed nor disagreed. Another notable challenge was the unclear guidelines regarding the use of social media for external communication, 50% of respondents strongly agreed that this is a challenge, 25% agreed and another 25% neither agreed nor disagreed.

Additionally, 58% or respondents agreed that poor integration of social media and other external communication is a challenge, 17% strongly agreed, 8% neither agreed nor disagreed but 17% disagreed. Apparently, budgetary concern and adequacy of content control are not clear challenges from the perspective of staff. It would be observed from Table 6 that 50% of

respondents are unsure about the preponderance of budgetary constraints as a challenge to the use of social media at La Palm Royal Beach Hotel, 33% of respondents however agreed that this is a challenge, 8% strongly agreed but 8% disagreed. Similarly, 42% of staff were unsure about whether the inadequacy of content control is a problem for the use of social media for external communication, 33% of respondents agreed, 17% Disagreed but 8 strongly agreed.

Further, 25% of respondents strongly agreed that there are security threats associated with the use of social media, 33% agreed, another 33% neither agreed nor disagreed. Again, 42% of respondents neither agreed nor disagreed that the hotel faces a challenge of finding the people with the requisite expertise to manage its external communication on social media, 25% of respondents however agreed that this is a challenge, also 33% strongly agreed.

In the interviews, management members explained and confirmed how some of the challenges earlier identified affect the organisation.

One manager explained:

It is quite discouraging when something that you have published doesn't perform exceptionally well. The issue is usually indicative of a larger problem of oversaturation or uninteresting content. Using social media management tool, such as Social Report, for monitoring engagement can help, but we currently do this manually and it is very challenging (Verbatim response of MG-2).

Corroborating the point made about the challenges to content management, another manager stated that:

In addition to encouraging employees to share content posted on of social pages, we also ought to make sure we are posting quality and interesting content that our target audience are interested in, and they will respond by sharing that content with their friends and family. This is not an easy task (Verbatim response of MG-2).

The quotation above shows that content management is an important challenge from the management perspective. This is especially because the hotel does not currently deploy a content management software.

Another challenge identified was weathering the storm of negative comments that could damage organisational reputation. This is true because content control is much decentralised on social media. A manager explained that

While social media can be an extremely powerful tool for building the reputation, it can also be equally as damaging to that reputation when the company faces negative feedback or comments from fans and followers (verbatim response of MG-1).

The loss of reputation on social media is a major challenge and also a risk to the hotel because although unjustified negative comments and damning remarks can be removed from the organisations social media pages, they cannot be totally avoided. This means that at any time there is the risk of a reputational loss. This is not all together very bad as it is also an opportunity to know what is not going well in the organisation and how to deal with the challenges.

The interviews revealed that managers are also concerned about the legalities of social media.

One manager explained that;

Because social media tools utilize multiple technologies and lend themselves particularly well to creative marketing-related activities, there is an acute concentration of legal issues involved with using social media. Intellectual property rights and compliance issues are just a few of these legal concerns. So like every serious organisation, we are careful with social media (verbatim response of MG-1).

A probe into the challenges of social media use for external communication revealed that La Palm Royal Beach Hotel faces a lot of challenges. The most preponderant of these are the legal issues surrounding the use of social media, unclear social media governance in the organisation and the poor integration of social media and other external communication. Other notable challenges are the pressures of content management and the unavailability of an automated content monitoring and management tool.

The identified challenges are commonly associated with the use of social media for external communication in various organisations because as Thurman (2008) observes, given the emergent nature of social media, relatively few organisations actually have a formalised set of policies to guide their own efforts, as well as for others to draw on or learn from.

This situation makes it very challenging for organisations to make the most out of social media. Generally, unclear social media governance implies unavailability or limited scope of social media guidelines, policy and strategy. Guidelines provide advice on how best to use social media tools to achieve a desired result, such as eliciting stakeholder engagement or providing

suggestions for creating interesting content. Policies, on the other hand, represent official positions that govern the use of social media by designated communicators in the organisation, such as detailing what constitutes acceptable use or outlining official processes for gaining access to social media sites. Weak social media governance is as bad as communicating with no objective or plan, according to Holtzhausen, (2005).

The findings of the study with respect to the concerns of the legal framework validate the report of Humphreys, (2010) who suggested that the structure of social media also presents an important challenge for effective external communication. Humphreys, (2010) explains that the information published by a company can now be copied, amended, edited and forwarded by others at will. Following from this, the best way to engage in this 'lawless' and unstructured environment is still a mystery for many organisations. The legal ramifications for employees' use of social media sites to view or distribute objectionable, illicit or offensive material are also not clear. Aside from this, social media is transnational and this also raises jurisdictional issues with regard to the prosecution of offenders for inappropriate use of copyright material (Humphreys, 2010).

Additionally, there is no escaping the reputational challenges organisations face in using social media for external communication. Though the uses of social media improves external communication by incorporating elements of relational and dialogic communication there in a central problem of control when using social media for corporate communication. This is because the nature and structure of social media is such that users can publish content with little or no restriction (Humphreys, 2010). That is as was found out in this study, earlier studies are also point to the possibility being victims of unjustified accusation and scathing attacks that could damage the reputation that the organisation has sought to improve through social media.

CHAPTER FIVE

SUMMARY, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Introduction

This chapter contains a summary of all major findings of the study. The chapter also presents the conclusions reached as a result of the analysis and lastly recommendations are proffered for consideration.

5.2 Summary

This study investigated the use of social media for external communication in the hospitality industry by adopting La-Palm Royal Beach Hotel as a case study. The study focused on identifying the social media technologies used by La Palm Royal Beach Hotel and examined how these social media technologies are used for external communication with the organisation's publics. The study also assessed the effectiveness of the social media technologies used by the organisation and the challenges associated with the use of social media for external communication.

The study was approached as a single case study, this involved the use of semi-structured questionnaires and in-depth interviews to obtain primary data from staff, management and key external publics of the hotel. The different categories of data obtained was subject to thematic and descriptive analysis.

It emerged that social media is considered as an important part of external communication mechanisms at La Palm Royal Beach Hotel. The hotel employs various social media technologies to interact with its external publics. The study revealed that Facebook, Instagram,

WhatsApp and LinkedIn are the social media sites used by the hotel. The use of multiple social media is suitable for the hotel's purpose and also gives it the opportunity to use new media to reach out to different publics. This is because social media has great potential for effectively communicating with external stakeholders.

Again, it was found out that social media at La Palm Royal beach hotel is targeted at clients, prospects and partners. The organisation adopts a strategic approach to social media management, but it does not have documented social media policy, and guideline. As a result of this, the approach to social media is based on the existing general communication policy. This is indicative of porous social media governance.

The use of social media helps La-Palm to establish and maintain mutually beneficial relationship with its clients, partners and other external publics. The organisation is effective in the use of social media for business promotion, for obtaining feedback, ensuring engagement and also for creating brand awareness. Further to that, customers and prospects are also able to keep updated on activities of the hotel through social media and also contact or connect with the hotel through these platforms.

Furthermore, it was revealed that the most significant challenge with the use of social media for external communication at La Palm Royal each is the legal issues surrounding the use of social media, unclear social media governance in the organisation and the poor integration of social media and other external communication. Other notable challenges are the demands of content management and the unavailability of an automated content monitoring and management tool.

5.3 Conclusion

The ensuing conclusions were reached based on the analysis of findings. First of all, the use of multiple social media technologies by La-Palm Royal Beach Hotel demonstrates the growing importance of internet and virtual communication in doing business as suggested by Gileman (2006). The use of these different social media technologies would ensure that the hotel is able to reach out to a lot of people using the combination of the various social media identified.

The use of social media at La Palm Royal Beach Hotel is strategic but not quite, as the organisation does not have a documented social media policy and clear written out guidelines. As a result, the use of social media by La Palm Royal Beach Hotel is intentional as Hermida and Thruman (2008) opined but at the same time this practice is not professional as Eltantawy and Weist (2011) stipulated.

Meanwhile, the use of social media for external communication at La Palm is effective in some areas, particularly, it creates opportunity for feedback. This is because social media opens up the hotel for direct feedback and for high level interdependence with stakeholders, an essential characteristic of open systems (Grossman, 2016). This is commendable because from the systems theory perspective, it is important for communication systems to operate as open systems accepting feedback for self-correction and improvement.

Lastly, the outcome of the study validates the surmise of Thurman (2008) that the absence of formalised set of policies to guide external communication on social media makes it very challenging for organisations to make the most out of social media. The absence of social media guidelines and policy at the hotel is indicative of poor social media governance. This situation further puts the organisation's reputation at risk as Humphreys (2010) suggested.

5.4 Recommendations

The following recommendations are made based on the conclusions of the study. First, it is important for the organisation to formulate and document a social media policy and establish clear social media guidelines that would support social media governance and make external communication more purposeful and effective.

It is also necessary for management of La Palm Royal Beach Hotel to consider adopting suitable content management and monitoring tools in order to improve content management and enhance content quality.

Also, the organisation should periodically evaluate its social media strategy to ensure participation, openness and a sense of community on one hand and effectiveness in representing organizational interests and achieving organizational objectives on the other.

Future studies could empirically assess the effectiveness of social media for internal communication in the hotel industry.

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APPENDIX 1

**GHANA INSTITUTE OF JOURNALISM (GIJ)
SCHOOL OF RESEARCH AND GRADUATE STUDIES
RESEARCH QUESTIONNAIRE**

This questionnaire designed to obtain data for an MA thesis on the topic: **The use of social media for external communication in the hospitality industry: a case of La-Palm Royal Beach Hotel.** Kindly complete this questionnaire as honestly and carefully as you can and be assured that information provided will solely be used for the research.

SECTION A: Biographic Information

- 8. Gender: Female Male
- 9. Age: 19-29 30-39 40-49 50-59
- 10. Position/Designation.....
- 11. How long have you worked with the La-Palm?

SECTION B: Social Media Platforms used by La Palm Royal Beach Hotel

- 12. Which social media platforms are you personally signed on to?
 - a. Facebook b. Twitter c. LinkedIn d. Instagram
 - e. WhatsApp f. other
- 13. What social media platforms do you know are used by this organisation?
 - a. Facebook b. Twitter c. LinkedIn d. Instagram
 - e. WhatsApp f. other

14. Which of the following categories of external stakeholders does your company target with social media?

- a. Industry regulators
- b. State actors
- c. Prospects
- d. Existing Clients
- e. Other

SECTION C: Using Social Media for External Communication

15. Which of the following best describes your company’s use of social media for external communication?

- a. Cautious
- b. Try-out
- c. Strategic
- d. Challenging

16. How would you describe the level of professionalism with which social media is used for external communication?

- a. Excellent
- b. very good
- c. Good
- d. Average
- e. Poor

17. Does your company have a documented social media policy?

- a. Yes
- b. No
- c. Not Sure

18. Does your company have a documented social media strategy?

- a. Yes
- b. No
- c. Not Sure

19. Does your company have a documented social media guidelines for external communication?

- a. Yes
- b. No
- c. Not Sure

SECTION D: Impact of social media on external public

How useful is social media to your organisation in the following areas?

20. Engagement of publics

	Extremely useful	Useful	Somehow	Not useful	Disappointing
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21. Obtaining feedback

	Extremely useful	Useful	Somehow	Not useful	Disappointing
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22. Business Promotion	Extremely useful	Useful	Somehow	Not useful	Disappointing
23. Influencing perception	Extremely useful	Useful	Somehow	Not useful	Disappointing
24. Connecting with clients	Extremely useful	Useful	Somehow	Not useful	Disappointing
25. Building brand awareness	Extremely useful	Useful	Somehow	Not useful	Disappointing

SECTION E: Challenges associated with the use of social media

Indicate the prevalence of the following social media challenges in your organisation

Challenges	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
26. Inadequate content control					
27. Unclear governance (guidelines)					
28. Legality/liability concerns					
29. Security threats					
30. Inadequate expertise					
31. Budgetary concerns					
32. Poor integration of social media and other external communication					

Other

33. In your opinion what can be done to improve the use of social media for external communication?

.....

Thank you!

APPENDIX 2

INTERVIEW GUIDE FOR KEY EXTERNAL PUBLICS

Introduction- Kindly introduce yourself and describe the nature of your relationship with La Palm Royal Beach Hotel

- 1. How do you usually communicate with or find out information about this hotel?**
- 2. Do you visit the organisation's social media pages (Facebook, Twitter, Pintrest), what for?**
- 3. How beneficial is social media to your communication with La Palm Royal Beach?**
- 4. How do you find the information available about La Palm on social media, in terms of;**
 - Usefulness**
 - Sufficiency**
 - Clarity**
 - Interactivity**
- 5. In what ways does social media influence your relationship with the hotel?**
- 6. What are the challenges you encounter in communicating with the hotel on social media?**
- 7. What can be done to improve the hotel's communication with you on social media?**

APPENDIX 3

INTERVIEW GUIDE FOR STAFF

Kindly introduce yourself stating designation and the nature of your job?

1. How is external communication conducted in this organisation?
2. How important is social media to you external communication activities?
3. Which social media tools, technologies or platforms do you use for external communication?
4. How does your company suitably communicate with external stakeholders using social media?
5. Kindly describe to me what your organisations social media strategy entail if you have one?
6. Kindly describe to me what your organisations social media policy contain if you have one?
7. What are the general guidelines for social media use in this organisation?
8. How will you describe the contribution of social media to your company's external communication efforts?
9. Which publics are you able to target and reach more effectively using social media?
10. What are some of the challenges associated with the use of social media for external communication in the organisation?
11. In your opinion what can be done to improve the use of social media for external communication?