



EVALUATION OF THE DIGITAL COMPETENCE OF TRANSCORP HILTON HOTEL ABUJA NIGERIA USING KEY PERFORMANCE INDICES MODEL AND BENCHMARK MODEL

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ABSTRACT

Tourism distribution has grown in recent times most especially with the growth of the world-wide web where Besides business to business (B2C) and business to customer (B2B) markets, online customer to customer (C2C) markets have evolved and technology fuelling increase traffic on digital and social media platforms that functions as a unceasing reminder of the real and virtual connections that bind all of us together as a global community. The study evaluated the digital competence of Transcorp hotel Abuja using Buhalis and Wagner (2012) and bench mark model and the Key performance indices(KPI) of Morgan et al (2012) with a finding that the hotel is lacking in use of its digital platforms to inspire, engage and share and distribute contents in order to benefit from the online community with a recommendation that the hotel marketing team should revise their strategies so as to cater to the needs of online buyers by tapping into the experience economy so as to ensure their marketing strategy offers their customers a service experience full of active challenges, physical wellbeing, emotional and intellectual fulfilment.

KEY WORDS: Digital Competence, Online community, Hotel, distribution.

INTRODUCTION

The world is changing, and tourism is embracing these new dynamics and trends of Innovation technologies which are critical for the administration and business of tourism organisations and destinations (Mingheti and Buhalis 2009) where it also determines tourist consumer behaviour through decision-making process of product search, consumption and after effect memories. The internet in particular has made searches for destinations, building of direct relationships between tourism providers and consumers easier without necessarily using intermediaries, giving access to alternatives, product attributes, price, and channels for creation of personalised itineraries and services which is much easier and richer than the traditional channels. Furthermore, with the web becoming one of the most significant open market for conducting business of goods and services, (leeflang et al 2014) e-consumer spending in America exceeded 100 billion dollars in 2007 evident in online channels like Amazon topping a peak on 26 November, 2012 where consumers purchased over 26.5 million USD worth of things globally across all product ranges, making a top record of 306 items sold per second (Fisch 2010 cited in leeflang et al 2014). Besides business to business (B2C) and business to customer (B2B) markets, online customer to customer (C2C) markets have evolved with substantial success with brands like LuLu, eBay, and YouTube for online digital communication with a significant rise from 10% in 2008 to over 20% in 2013 making print media to lose shares (Marketing news, May 2013, p. 16 cited in leeflang et al 2014).

AIM AND OBJECTIVE

The study aims to ascertain the marketing capability of Transcorp Hilton hotel Abuja through application of digital technologies and it seeks to achieve this through the following specific objectives

1. To gauge how they use digital technology platforms to inspire customers to use their services before travel
2. To know if the customers use digital technology platforms during their stay to share their experiences
3. To find out if the hotel leverages on customers post visit experiences as they use digital technology platforms

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. Does Transcorp Hilton use digital technology platforms to inspire customers to utilize its products and services?
2. What digital platforms do customers use to share their experiences of their stay in the hotel
3. How does the hotel monitor customers sharing of their experiences through digital platforms on the hotels products and services?

LITERATURE REVIEW

DIGITAL COMPETENCE CONCEPT

Travel and tourism is a human experience with human touch that links people, this linkage are aided by technology which fuels the increasing bustle on digital and social media platforms that functions as a unceasing reminder of the real and virtual connections that bind all of us together as a global community (Naidoo 2013). Therefore, the European council in 2006 cited in ec-europa (2014) saw digital linkages skills as digital competence and defined it as

"Digital competence involves the confident and critical use of information Society technology (IST) for work, leisure, learning and communication. It is underpinned by basic skills in ICT: the use of computers to retrieve, access, store, produce, present and exchange information, and to communicate and participate in collaborative networks via the Internet."

Furthermore Buhalis and Foerste (2015) added that in future ,the capability of a marketer will be based on his skills of sourcing information that tends to create a highly relevant marketing message which will comprehensively address tourist's needs, engage him in a continuous dialogue for co-creating value through a combination of digital skills of Web 2.0 applications like Social media, context, marketing on the mobile device(SOCOMO) so as to increase personalisation as well as address each individual desires within a short time period and in the same manner encourage consumers to perform within the changing marketplace through systems of personalised context-aware recommender systems. Therefore, marketing team of a destination marketing organisation (DMO) need to have the skill and ability to tap from the huge amount of rich information available on the net to meet real time needs of dynamic consumers Royle and Lang (2014)

It has been observed that a lot of travelers now use social media when preparing for a trip, to discover destinations, bargains, advice and reviews from other travelers, making tourism and hospitality businesses to embrace social media, like other services organizations who have moved from providing and publishing information to ones that create appealing and engaging content that people want to share, stimulate user-generated content and nurture relationships online (UNWTO 2014).With that, destination marketers are expected to solidify their e-marketing and specifically their inbound marketing strategy, to improve their social media tactics as a vital part of that strategy linking them to objectives and goals, as well as allocating resources that prove results in this fast moving media landscape. In like manner, Naidoo (2013) in an article quoted the South African minister of tourism in 2013 highlighting the relevance of digital media to tourism say

‘Radio took 38 years to get 50 million users while it was 12 years for television to reach an audience of 50 million viewers. However, only 3 and half years took Facebook have 50 million users and three years only for Twitter attain 50 million users’.

OBJECTIVES OF DIGITAL MARKETING

Ryan (2014) in his study of e commerce observed that unlike the traditional means of marketing, the internet is unique in that it has a capacity to extend the space of marketing influence but also can narrow it at the same time where it cuts across geographical and time boundaries likewise connecting to a wider audience. He further developed a variety of tools, methods and strategies of which marketers can use to engage and get to specific and niche consumers with a laser like specific precision in a challenging, dynamic and more diversified means of resources through a system of aligning digital marketing activities with business goals, clearly defined strategy values, benefits and targeting of right people as suggested in table 2.

Table 1: Digital marketing objectives relationships to strategy and benefits for a hospitality and tourism business

Elements of Digital Objectives	Creating and sustaining destination knowledge (2) Global awareness reach (3) Motivating journey planning (4) Improving destination image as a popular and enticing place to visit (5) New and specific market targeting (6) Improving visitor patronage and numbers (7) creation of destination hub and buzz (8) Tendency to increase the number of email subscription (9) Increase in Facebook fan base (10) Altering the personality of destination to visitors.
Strategy used In the Objectives	(1) competition (2) collaborative campaign with, bloggers, superstars and online influencers (3) personal computer games;(4) meeting planners
Digital tools used	Facebook; YouTube; Google, Google Street View, Instagram; Twitter, Flickr; Tencent, Weibo, Blogs, Foursquare, Yelp, Gowala, Android applications, Smartphone applications
Mission /Vision of Digital Competence	To be interactive with all stakeholders creative where Participants are stimulated to use geolocation tools, augmented reality, play internet games, create quizzes, write guide books, blogs, articles, and stories, create postcards, photos, videos, travel and shopping plans and share experiences online
Values of Digital Competence	To reinforce the romantic nature of a destination, make customers adore the destination, To create a need of the destination by visitors, To grow more bookings where passions are associated to destination through stories, engagements, romance, cute characters (avatars), good and bad referrals, connecting brand stories channel to public.
Digital Strategy Incentives	1) Dream vacation and packages (2) offering a dream job (3) remake (4) publicity
The benefits for the destination	(1) Returns on investment (2) Enhanced visitor patronage (3) More positive awareness (4) More preference of place choice (5) Awards (6) Free publicity (7) Increase in website hits (8) Higher website and Facebook referrals (9) Facebook fans increase constantly (10) User generated content (11) Gaining new ambassadors for the destination (12) Public relations.

Source: Adapted from Ryan 2014p 25-95.

DIGITAL MARKETING STRATEGY

Chaffey and Chadwick 2012 defined it as a set of specific channeled objectives that a company develops through a differential channel proposition and a channel specific communication consistent with the characteristics of the channel and end user agreements. However, Ryan (2014) argued that there is no one exact approach of digital strategy that fits all companies so every organization needs to define its own digital strategy based on its overall organizational goals and objectives it sets to achieve. Despite this, the SOSTAC outline of table 2 gives an insight into what a digital strategy planning frame work can be for all Organisations.

Table 2: Digital Marketing Strategy planning development framework

SOSTAC Variable	Explanations to the effects
Situation Analysis	Where the organisation is now through making an e market swot analysis, reviewing its customer insights, brand perception, external stakeholders, internal resources and capabilities
Objectives	Assessing where the organisation wants to be through its customer acquisition and retention targets, customer satisfaction indices, vision, numerical volumes and cost of projected sales through the digital channel
Strategy	How it intends getting there like segmentation, online value proposition, targeting, online customer relationship management
Tactics	Expanding in detail how the strategy will be achieved using the e marketing mix, digital communications channels,
Actions	The details of who does what, when and how in terms of structures, responsibilities, outsourcing etc.
Control	This looks at the management information systems to monitor performance such as key performance indicators(KPI), customer satisfaction surveys, site visitor profiles, Web analytics to assess if objectives are achieved and where needs improvement or strategizing.

Source: Adapted from Chaffey and Chadwick 2012 p 199

Despite its importance, it's worth noting that in the SOSTAC framework each stage is not a finite state rather it overlaps with the other stages during planning and implementation so also due to the speed of development of digital technology, other approaches like prescriptive strategy, emergent strategy by (Lynch 2000 cited in Chaffey and Chadwick 2012) and strategic windows that looks at opportunities arising through significant changes in environment are worth taking into consideration. In addition, the European travel commission (ETC) with the United Nations world tourism organization (UNWTO) in 2014 have developed guides that tourism and hospitality businesses need to follow (figure 1) to achieve a sound digital strategy while also recognizing the values embedded in the elements of best practice.

Figure 1: Steps involved in a digital marketing strategy



Source: Adapted from: ETC and UNWTO report 2014 p 129.

DIGITAL COMPETENCE IN TOURISM AND HOSPITALITY BUSINESSES

As a study by Inversini et al (2009) suggest that the internet arena is being highly populated by a variety of competitors which entails destinations to be auspiciously distinguished from its competitors through information and communication technologies (ICT) development that increases the changing rapport between the business and their customers (Kirá'lová and Pavlíčka 2015). As the effects of smart, connected products flow into the hospitality, transport, aviation and tourism industries, the reliance on products that will become smart and connected cannot be overemphasised. For instance, an airline with smart connected planes, on board flight systems, and baggage compartments can operate with far greater efficiency (Porter and Heppelmann 2015) and competitiveness than those without the technology in this millennial age. To this end, Naidoo (2013) quoted the tourism Minister of Seychelles Marthinus Van Schalkwyk saying "Digital is a principal key of all tourism and hospitality businesses marketing activities, by making the businesses to meaningfully interact directly with their prospective customers and to connect with trade partners"

In addition, Batista (2013) advanced that for a digital marketing strategy of any destination to be effective the following digital competencies needs to be taken into consideration by the destination since marketing has been advanced to be a balance of art and science.

Figure 2: Principles of digital competencies

Targeting	Engagement	Conversion	Analytics	Technology
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •The act of blending demographics with Digital Body Language, and providing valuable information aligned with their buyers' journeys. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •modern marketers need to engage effectively by using the concepts of personalized content to match offers to interests across all of the buyer's preferred channels. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •This entails marketers understand how programs turn into revenue by knowing the customer's buying cycle, engaging the buyer meaningfully, and implementing repeatable processes for success. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Measuring marketing effectiveness by equipping marketers with reports on key attributes of buyer ,channel, understanding what works and not to have real-time of analytics to anticipate change,as well as real-time benchmarking solutions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •No one can predict what the next cool channel or technology will be. But the platform of the future has to be built to make it easy for new technologies and channels to be integrated into the daily life of the marketer

Source: Adapted from Batista (2013).

Accordingly, in nowadays digital environment, consumers simply chart their own course to search and engage with potential partners for business and other engagements. Marketers are thus challenged to nurture a meaningful role in this discovery process through social media, mobile, and digital channels which enable a constant stream of connectivity. Royle and Lang (2014) added that the biggest changes brought about by the development of Web 2.0 is the abundance of a sea of information where businesses and individuals promote their services, products, reviews and blogs, opinions thereby creating a repository of information that makes it necessary for future marketing experts to develop the necessary skills to fish out relevant information that exists online.

In the light of this, Baggio (2014a) in his study of the connection between technology and tourism, concluded that it has now become a delicate and perplexing relationship where to one side ICTs have made its tools accessible to all participants (supply and demand) mechanisms that are greatly effective and efficient to produce and distribute, or to choose and buy, while on the other end it has strengthened their power and triggered a times fierce selection of the actors, mostly from the supply side, provoking the elimination from the market those who have shown little capacity to use what is obtainable. Identically, Baggio and Chiapab (2013) argued that performance of a tourism business as a whole is influenced by the web of connections between its various players and not merely on the inherent appearances of the business. Correspondingly March and Wilkinson (2009) also reasoned to the effect that digital business ecosystems (DBE)

and its contributions to enhancement of network interactions can also be essential for business competitiveness being evident in the symbiotic mix of relationships between objectives, strategy and success factors.

CONSUMER EXPERIENCE WITH DIGITAL TECHNOLOGY

Technology is now transforming experience creation through the offer of a high level of interactivity, personalization and social engagement where the best digital campaigns often involve simple ideas, elegantly executed (Tanti and Buhalis 2016) while the digital media connectivity influences consumers buying behaviour before, during and after their trip through increasing communication, information gathering and co-creation. Furthermore (Inversini et al 2009) advanced that this creates an experience economy where people go along with their internet mobile devices empowered with photo, video cameras and instant publishing multimedia. Likewise Baggio (2014b) said creativity and innovation are seen now to be central features for the profitable growth in tourism given the recent great progress and diffusion of technological tools, strong and globalized competition put companies, individuals and destinations under constant pressure which calls for much higher levels of innovation in their offers and the procedures their products and services are offered to the market which will go a long way in helping hotels and similar service establishments to be more competitive and competent in a digital age. In addition, Renio et al (2016) see the future of digital competence in tourism adopting the interoperability concept where different organisations co-operate towards a commonly favourable and established common goals encompassing sharing of information and knowledge amongst them through business process they support by exchanging information between the respective ICT systems.

MATERIAL AND METHODS

The empherical analysis focussed on Transcorp hotel Abuja Nigeria. and its digital competence in terms of gauging it through industry best practice using the Wagner and Buhalis (2012) model of a benchmark analysis where all destinations can utilise technologies to improve the personalisation of the content of the websites as well as having personalised itinerary planners on the websites through three stages of

- x. Before the trip: Use technology to inspire people and use technology to inform people
- x. During the trip: Use technology to engage during their trip
- x. Post trip engagement by remembering

And Morgan et al (2012) Key performance indices metrics to measure only what can be measured rather than what should be measured on the hotel website of a destination. This metrics are a

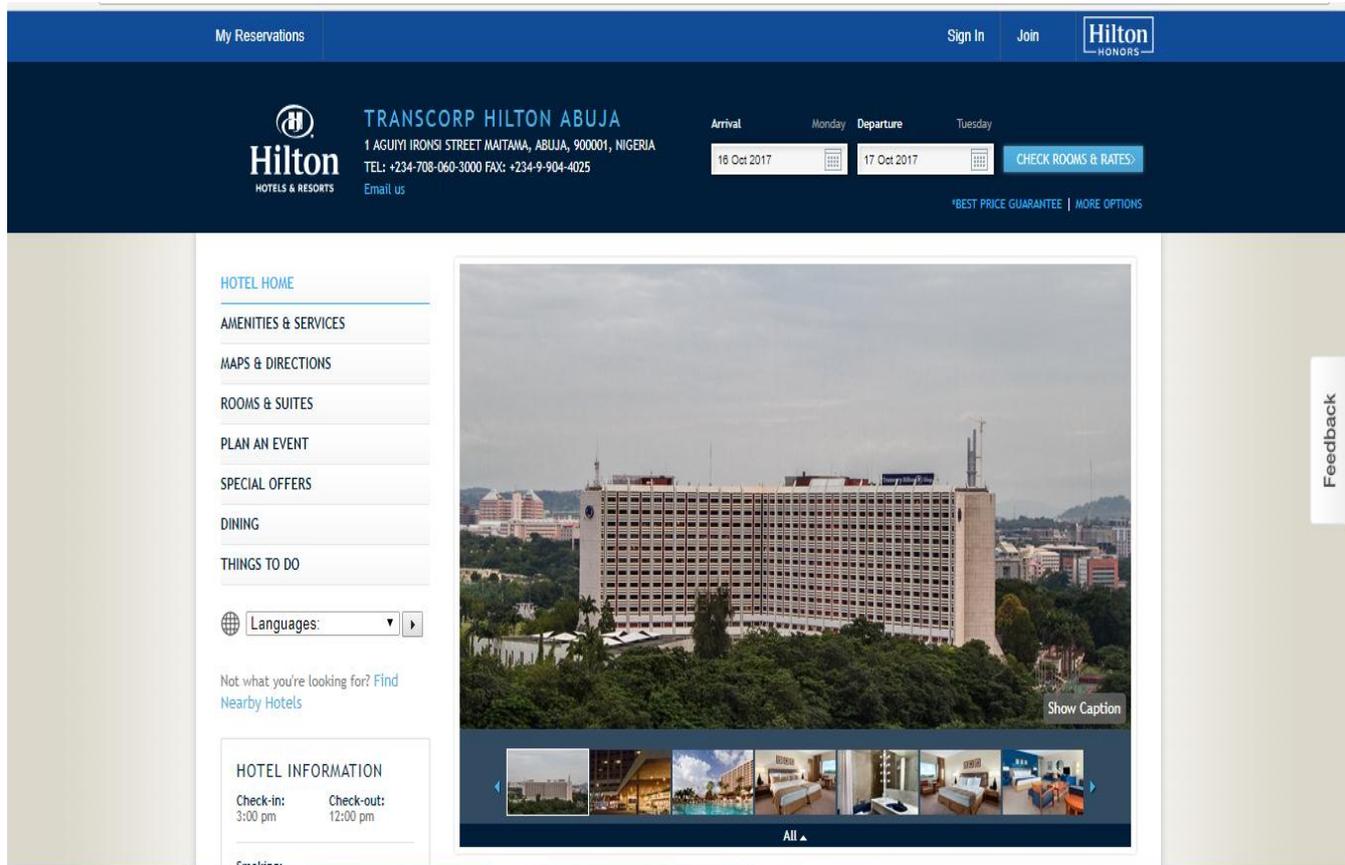
combination of website visibility, search engine optimisation of the website, value per respondent's visits, interaction through web 2.0 platforms on the site.

The study gauged the analysis on pitching the two models against the observed content to see if it meets industry standards and elicits the required digital competence in its reach, engagement, client's empowerment and content shares with responses. The analysis and findings are reflected in table of findings while the discussions of the implications will follow

STUDY AREA

News express (2016) reported that Transcorp Hilton Abuja was in 2015 recognised by Hilton Hotels & Resorts Brand as an award winner for best tactical marketing campaign for Middle East & Africa (MEA), while also winning the premier honour awarded by Trip Advisor in 2016 as Trip Advisor Travellers' Choice awards for Hotels, ranking first out of 64 hotels in Abuja Nigeria based on the reviews and opinions of global travel community. However, a look at its website (Figure 2) and its digital competence and interactions using the model and the findings are as follows in table 3 below

Figure 3: Website page of Transcorp Hilton Hotel Abuja



Source: <http://www3.hilton.com>.

Table 3: Transcorp Hilton Abuja Digital Competence Findings

	Buhalis and Wagner Bench mark for technology performance				
Morgan et al Key Performance Indicators	Inspire	Inform	Engage	Facilitate/ Share content	Feedback mechanism
Destination awareness through its website visibility	Average	Quite good	No social media icons for engagement	None	Not visible to first time visitor
Entire promotion awareness Through find ability of website and SEO effectiveness.	Good	Average	Good	None	Only telephone and e mail
Claimed/Known campaign response	Average	Average	Average	None	None
Emotional proximity (a measure of brand engagement	Not seen	Not visible	No link on that	Not visible	Not seen
Conviction to visit	Not specified	Not Applicable	Not seen	Not Specified	Quite Vague
Conversion throughout decision making process	Have a trip advisor rating	Seen on the website	Only limited positive reviews	No independent other reviews	Have not seen any communication on review feedback
Value per respondent	No Stats shown	No stats shown	No stats shown	Not observed	Not observed
Interaction on Twitter (or another micro blogging site), Facebook, or other relevant social channels	No social media accounts visible	No social media accounts visible	No social media accounts visible	No social media accounts visible	No social media accounts visible
Engagement with the brand on different devices - PC, tablet and mobile.	Quite good on such platforms	Compatible	Usage ok	None observed	None observed
E-newsletter (email sign up).	Visible but not interactive	Long time to respond	None	None	None

(Adapted from Buhalis and Wagner 2012; Morgan et al 2012; <http://www3.hilton.com.2017>)

DISCUSSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

From table 1 analysis of the different contents of the website and web 2.0 platforms of the hotel digital competence it was observed that the website is visible and top on SEO however it fails to incorporate the social media platforms to its website in order to benefit from engagement from its customers likewise sharing of contents and getting feedback on services offered if they are

satisfied or otherwise. It also has a trip advisor rating but there are only few reviews by customers and no satisfactory replies to answer some of the issues rose about services offered. This comes into play as Malthouse et al (2013) since the evolving area for marketing now is by using social customer relations marketing because todays customers gravitate towards websites that have content which offers them the opportunity to be involved in the co-creation process.

The hotel does not really make use of the social media platforms like twitter and Instagram, however it has a Facebook icon that does not offer much in terms informing, sharing, engaging and facilitating content with little or no brand emotional campaign visible on the website. Because as argued by Morgan et al (2012) a lot of hotels use outdated evaluation methods that are not adequate measures of performance since technology is transforming the industry and where hotels do not have, use, manage and monitor social media and reviews, they are not likely to thrive in this decade even if they have a brand with a good emotional appeal.

In terms of distribution of its services online it was observed that the claimed campaign and e newsletter are not interactive nor do they portray the brand name or facilitate feedback and sharing mechanisms with customers as argued by Buhalis (2003) where he concluded that distribution represents the most critical element for the competitiveness of tourism organisations and destinations and appropriate distribution channels act as a bridge between suppliers and customers, addressing their requirements and offering personalised services at every stage (Buhalis and Laws 2001). While hotels need to truly communicate with guests, offering both an outstanding brand image on their website and indirect distribution through OTAs (Green and Lomanno 2012).

CONCLUSIONS

Hospitality businesses are constantly facing a range of multifaceted problems when developing an online presence, especially a Web 2.0 presence but they further argued that many of them can improve their position through recognising social media as marketing instrument, generating a formal, but flexible, strategy, policy and action aligned to allow a lot of room for experimentation due to the enormous benefits of humanising a brand and increased engagement far outweigh any demerits in the long run.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR PRACTICE AND INDUSTRY IN NIGERIA

As a recommendation tourism and hospitality businesses can adopt the model by Chaston (2001) based on his study of different types and levels of customer orientation in the digital era for a competitive business advantage.

Digital Orientation	Customer	Characteristics of the Customer	Routes to competitive advantage by organization
Conservative Transactional		Seeking standard specification of goods or service	Offering price/quality/value standard superior to competitors through excellence in production and distribution logistics
Conservative relationship Customer		Who seek standard and want to co-create and possibly customize aspects of service and delivery system	By offering value achieved through superior customer centric solutions
Entrepreneurial Transaction customers		Customers seeking innovative products /services which can be bought by not necessarily forming an alliance with suppliers	Offer new products that have new features and service performance not available within standard procedures.
Entrepreneurial relationship customers		Those whom want to work with suppliers to produce innovative products and experiences	Offer new product in partnership thereby enabling the customer to use his ability in contributing to launching new innovative products and experiences

Table 6: Routes to Digital competitive advantage based on Customer orientation (Adapted from Chaston 2001 p 110-111)

A second model worth adopting to use by any hospitality outfit is the one advanced by Peter et al (2013) where they developed a framework with the understanding that a brand is an essential actor in a network with no authority of hierarchical nature that can impose opinion on commercial messages to customers being that social media is egalitarian in nature with different stages of interactivity thus a marketer needs to understand the contingency, structure, sequence ,goals actions and reactions and the characteristics of each medium since there are a lot of channels that have evolved over time and are still evolving.

Thirdly, another field of potential improvement is with recent rapid development of the digital age and the emergence of online distribution channels and ecommerce, the hotel marketing team should revise their strategies so as to cater to the needs of online buyers (Law 2007) by tapping into the experience economy so as to ensure their marketing strategy offers their customers a service experience full of active challenges, physical wellbeing, emotional and intellectual fulfilment.

Fourthly, the hotels value proposition can be communicated more effectively through offering the value narrative a more prominent spot on its website and positioning it in a more expressive way. Customers too can be encouraged to integrate the mutual brand values when sharing, engaging and posting contents on the various social media platforms thus acting as agents for the brand (Day 2011) and incorporating the communicated personality values.

And lastly, the hotel can create content by engaging with customers on its Web 2.0 environment. Where they share, and generate content, exchange advice and make recommendations which generate ideas and provide big data for the hotel to tap in for future marketing.

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Appendix 1

Website of Transcorp Hotel Abuja Nigeria.