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### THE EFFECTIVENESS OF SOCIAL MEDIA MARKETING IN THE HOTEL INDUSTRY

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#### ABSTRACT

The unparalleled popularity of social media has forced scholars to inquire about the marketing effectiveness, especially in the hotel industry. This study attempts to analyze the marketing effectiveness of two different social media sites (Facebook and Instagram) in the hotel industry. Integrating the attitude toward the ad (Aad) model with the concepts of attitude toward the social media page, this study proposes a theoretical model of social media marketing effectiveness in hotels. Based on the data collected from the online survey, the goodness of fit of the model implies that the Aad model provides a befitting theoretical framework to explain the effectiveness of social media marketing in the hotel industry. The results revealed that hotel customers' social media experiences influence their attitude towards the social media site, which further influences their trust and attitude towards the hotel brand, and hotel customers' attitude towards the hotel brand affects their intentions of booking that hotel and, in turn, intentions to spread the electronic word of mouth. The study also indicates that different social media sites display almost the same marketing effectiveness, suggesting that hotel managers use the very same marketing tactics for both Facebook and Instagram marketing.

**Keywords:** Marketing effectiveness, social media, attitude towards the social media site, social media marketing, Social media effectiveness.

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#### INTRODUCTION

In recent years, the rise of social media platforms has influenced the hotel industry extremely in many ways. There are an increasing number of hotels that focus their marketing strategies on social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, etc.

According to the Merriam-Webster dictionary, social media is defined as “forms of electronic communication through which users create online communities to share information, ideas, personal messages, and other content” (Merriam-Webster, 2012). A study by Madden and Zickuhr (2011) reported that 65% of U.S. adult Internet users (50% of all U.S. adults) now use social networking sites, more than double the percentage reported in 2008 (29%) and that 43% of online adults use social networking sites daily. Among various social media sites, Facebook and Instagram were ranked as the top two most popular sites in terms of traffic (“The 7 biggest social media sites in 2020”, [searchenginejournal.com](http://searchenginejournal.com)).

The uncontrollable growth of social media channels has transformed the way many consumers interact with each other and with businesses and this is changing the way we do business and how businesses attract and retain customers. A study showed that social media channels were commonly used by businesses to connect with their customers than Google (The eMarketer, 2011). About 75% of hotels use social media for marketing purposes (Hotelmktg.com, 2011). Facebook and Instagram were also found to be the two most useful social media channels for marketing purposes in the hospitality industry.

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These days, as more hotels incorporate social media into their integrated marketing communications, the attention on its effectiveness is rising. Although social media is claimed to be effective in improving marketing practices, how to measure the marketing effectiveness of social media is one of the most important questions marketers need to continue to investigate and very few studies have examined the effectiveness of social media promotions in the academic world. Therefore, the main purpose of this study was to explore the marketing effectiveness of social media using advertising theory, particularly, attitude toward the ad model, and attitude toward the website model.

This study intended to achieve the following objectives: (a) to develop a hypothesized model of social media marketing effectiveness for a hotel based on the Attitude toward the ad and the Attitude toward the website models; (b) to test the hypothesized model in the context of the two most popular social media sites: Facebook and Instagram; (c) to compare the marketing effectiveness of two of the social media pages of the hotel; and (d) to provide suggestions for the hotel industry in leveraging social media marketing.

### LITERATURE REVIEW

#### Attitude toward the ad

The concept of Aad was first introduced by Mitchell and Olson (1981) and Shimp (1981) and they found it to be an affective construct referring to individuals' favorable/unfavorable feelings toward a particular advertisement after an ad exposure. Many studies have tested that Aad has a mediating influence on brand attitudes and purchase intentions (MacKenzie et al., 1986; Lutz, Mackenzie, & Belch, 1983; Shimp, 1981; Mitchell & Olson, 1981). The Aad model describes possible sequences of exposure to an effective advertisement and generally postulates that a recipient of an advertising message develops an Aad, which, further applies an influence on consequent measures of advertising effectiveness such as brand attitude and purchase intentions (Lutz et al., 1983). Studies on Aad have proposed four competing Aad models representing the different roles of Aad (Lutz et al., 1983; MacKenzie et al., 1986). The four Aad models are based on four alternative hypotheses: Affect Transfer Hypothesis (ATH), Independent Influences Hypothesis (IFH), Dual Mediation Hypothesis (DMH), and Reciprocal Mediation Hypothesis (RMH).

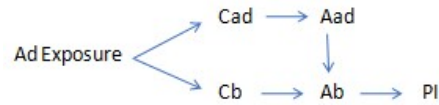
In all the four Aad models, ad cognitions and brand cognitions have direct impacts on Aad and attitude toward the brand. However, different hypotheses postulate that Aad has different impacts on attitude toward the brand and purchase intention. The ATH model postulates a direct influence of Aad and brand cognitions on attitude toward the brand. The DMH model postulates both a direct effect of Aad on attitude toward the brand and an indirect effect through the mediation of brand cognition. The RMH model is based on the balance theory (Heider, 1946) and asserts a reciprocal causal flow between Aad and attitude toward the brand, that is, these two constructs affect each other. The basic assertion of balance theory is that a person has a preference to maintain balance among a set of cognitive components in a system (Heider, 1946). In advertising, the consumer, the ad, and the brand constitute the system (Edell & Burke, 1984). Thus, the ad-brand relationship is always a balanced state, suggesting Aad and attitude toward the brand are positively correlated (Edell & Burke, 1984). The ITH model assumes no causal relationship between Aad and attitude toward the brand and both have direct impact on purchase intentions (Howard, 1977).

Many studies compared the four competing Aad models using experimental data and demonstrated that the DMH model provides the best fit to the data. That is, Aad has both direct and indirect effects through brand cognitions on attitude toward the brand. The Aad model has been rarely applied in the hospitality field. In hospitality research, brand cognition is often studied as brand equity or brand awareness. Brand equity as customer's cognitive awareness or mindset of a brand has been demonstrated to influence customers' purchase intentions and brand choices in the hospitality industry. Kim, Jin-Sun, and Kim (2008) stated that brand awareness has a positive effect on mid priced hotel guests' revisit intention. In this study, the measures of brand awareness were used to measure brand cognition and trust.

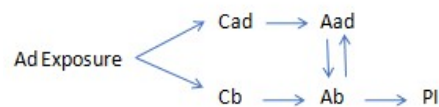
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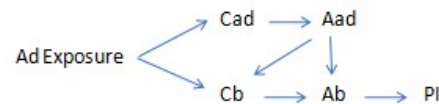
### AFFECT TRANSFER HYPOTHESIS



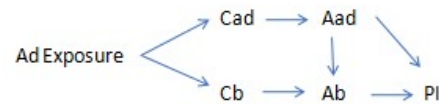
### RECIPROCAL MEDIATION HYPOTHESIS



### DUAL MEDIATION HYPOTHESIS



### INDEPENDENT INFLUENCES HYPOTHESIS



*Cad* – Ad cognition  
*Cb* – Brand cognition  
*Aad* – Attitude toward the ad  
*Ab* – Attitude toward the brand  
*PI* – Purchase intention

**Fig 1: Attitude toward the Ad models**

### WOM and eWOM

Word of mouth (WOM) has always been an important concept in the marketing field. Word-of-mouth (WOM) has been an important concept in the marketing field for decades. Arndt (1967) has defined WOM as an oral, person to person communication between a communicator and receiver that is perceived as a noncommercial message. In the late 1990s, the concept of WOM was expanded to be applied in the Internet-based communications and the power of WOM has become stronger. The electronic word of mouth (eWOM) is defined as “all informal communications directed at consumers through Internet-based technology related to the usage or characteristics of particular goods and services, or their sellers” (Litvin, Goldsmith, & Pan, 2008). WOM and eWOM can serve as both marketing tools and marketing outcomes.

As marketing tools, WOM and eWOM are powerful in influencing consumers’ attitudes, product evaluation, customer loyalty, and purchase intentions and decisions. Numerous researches demonstrate that WOM and eWOM are more influential than conventional marketing tools. On the other hand, they are also considered as the key marketing outcomes, which are as important as customer loyalty (Casaló, Flavián, & Guinaliú, 2010;

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Hennig-Thurau et al., 2002). Many studies have been conducted in an attempt to gain understanding into the antecedents and motives of WOM and eWOM (Dichter, 1966; Hennig-Thurau, Gwinner, Walsh, & Gremler, 2004; Sundaram, Mitra, & Webster, 1998).

In the hospitality field, the drivers of WOM have also been studied in several contexts and attitude has been identified as an important attribute of WOM communication. Leach et al. (2008) proposed a model of conference attendance that included both intention to attend and intention to recommend (WOM). The findings suggested that attitude toward conference is the most important factor affecting both intention to attend a future conference and intention to recommend the conference to others. Thus, we also incorporated intention to spread WOM with hotel booking intention in the hypothesized model.

### RESEARCH GAP

Xi Y. Leung, Billy Bai, Kurt A Stahura (2012) tested a similar conceptual framework to determine the effectiveness of social media marketing in hotels. However, their research is limited to Facebook and Twitter, the two social media platforms that had the highest traffic back then. This study focuses on Facebook and Instagram, the two social media sites ranked as the top two most popular sites in terms of traffic in 2020. This study also postulates that the trust factor affects the purchase or booking intention. This study analyses the existing Facebook and Instagram marketing practices and tools, benefits, and concerns associated with this type of social media marketing. Hence understanding the effectiveness of social media marketing will aid the hotels to understand how to attract more customers and how to distinguish themselves from their competitors.

### RESEARCH HYPOTHESES

This study postulated that the affect transfer hypothesized (ATH) Aad model can be applied as a theoretical framework to explain the effectiveness of social media marketing for hotels. The ATH model postulates that Aad and Cb both have direct impact on attitude toward the brand, which in turn affects their trust and purchase intention. Since social media are types of websites, the study incorporated the concept of Aws into the ATH model, in which Aws is actually attitude towards the social media page. In addition, this study is focused on hotel social media pages as a whole rather than a particular advertising message on the social media page. As a result, the Aad concept in the Aad model was left out in the proposed model. Thus, in the model proposed by the study, hotel customers' attitudes toward social media pages are proposed to have direct impacts on their attitudes and trust toward hotel brand, which then influences their hotel booking intention. Hotel customers' social media experience and brand cognition are postulated to affect their attitudes toward social media sites and attitudes toward hotel brand. Besides, the study added intention of eWOM as another major marketing outcome of social media that is expected to be determined by both attitudes toward hotel brand and hotel booking intention. Seven directional hypotheses were proposed.

H1: The more positive a customer's social media experience, the more positive the customer's attitude toward the social media site.

H2: The more positive a customer's attitude toward the social media site, the more positive the customer's attitude toward the hotel brand.

H3: The higher a customer's cognition of a hotel brand, the more positive the customer's attitude toward the hotel brand.

H4: The higher a customer's trust of a hotel brand, the more positive the customer's attitude toward the hotel brand.

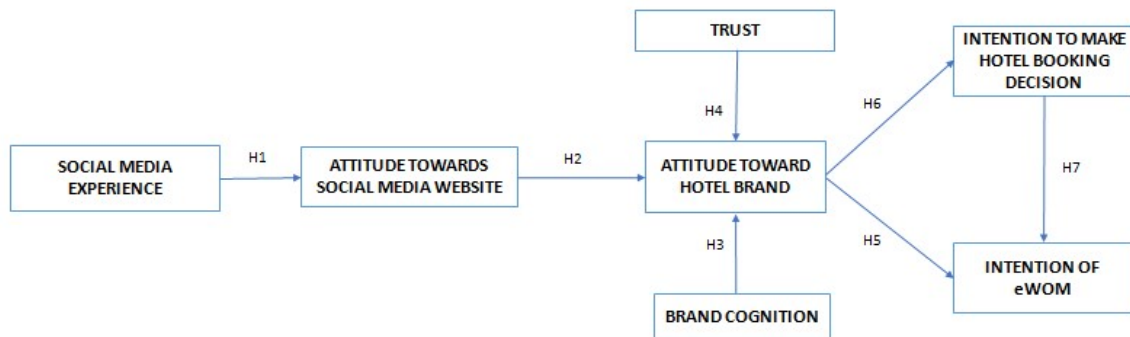
H5: The more positive a customer's attitude toward a hotel brand, the more likely the customer will book this hotel brand.

H6: The more positive a customer's attitude toward a hotel brand, the more likely the customer will spread positive word-of-mouth about this hotel brand online.

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H7: The more likely a customer to book a hotel brand, the more likely the customer to spread positive word-of-mouth about this hotel brand online.



*Fig 2: Proposed Framework*

### RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study can further be put into test by collecting data. An extensive questionnaire can be designed to test all the 7 hypotheses. The sampling technique and sample size may be different but the respondents must have their own social media accounts.

### FUTURE ENHANCEMENT

The evaluation of the model adequacy can be assessed by a comparative fit index (CFI); subsequently, a structural equation model (SEM) may be used to test the proposed conceptual model based on the maximum likelihood approach followed by invariance tests. Based on the recommendation of Kline (2005), this study can be assessed with several goodness-of-fit indices: standardized root mean square residual (SRMR), root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA), nonnormed fit index (NNFI). These analyses could help in processing the proposed framework.

### CONCLUSION

The purpose of this study was to propose a theoretical framework to understand the marketing effectiveness of different social media sites in the hotel industry. This study explores a conceptual framework which helps in understanding the significance of social media involvement while planning to book a hotel. These determinants will help hotels to make more effective promotions and also provides insight on how they can encourage their consumers to give feedback.

Understanding the effects of social media in booking a hotel could create more innovative opportunities and ideas for both the hospitality sector and consumers.

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