

**CRITICAL SUCCESS FACTORS FOR SELF-DRIVEN
MARKETING ON SOCIAL MEDIA: A CASE STUDY
OF THE SRI LANKAN BOUTIQUE HOTEL
INDUSTRY**

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Degree of Master of Business Administration
in Information Technology

Department of Computer Science & Engineering

University of Moratuwa

Sri Lanka

June 2018

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Thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master
of Business Administration in Information Technology

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June 2018

DECLARATION

I declare that this is my own work and this thesis does not incorporate without acknowledgement any material previously submitted for a Degree or Diploma in any other University or institute of higher learning and to the best of my knowledge and belief it does not contain any material previously published or written by another person except where the acknowledgement is made in the text.

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Dr. H. M. N. Dilum Bandara

Signature of the supervisor:

Date:

ABSTRACT

Boutique hotels are adopting social media to build relationships, spread word of mouth, initiate quality engagement that will ultimately turn into bookings, and to build a brand over their competition. Such engagement on social media is considered to be attractive as they enable targeted marketing, direct customer engagement, multiple forms of engagement, low cost, and facilitates self-promotion. However, the effectiveness of social media-based market initiatives is not clear as they primarily rely on soft metrics such as the number of likes, sharing, and comments than the actual customer conversions. Moreover, it is unclear what factors to be considered when conducting social media marketing by business owners themselves. We address these problems through a case study of ten boutique hotels in Sri Lanka with strong social media presence. The research was conducted as qualitative analysis based on the Straussian grounded theory. This version of grounded theory allows a literature review for theoretical sampling, concept development, and defining properties and dimensions. Data were gathered through a set of face-to-face and telephone interviews. We found nine factors that mainly contribute to successful social media presence. Those factors include the target audience, platform for communication, mode of communication, maintaining engagement, audience reach, timing, resources, company policies and platform rules and regulations.

Keywords: Boutique hotels, Grounded theory, Social Media, Social Media Marketing, Social Presence

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

I wish to express my sincere gratitude to all those who helped me in successfully completing my research study on “Critical Success Factors for Self-Driven Marketing on Social Media: A Case Study of the Sri Lankan Boutique Hotel Industry”.

First and foremost, I wish to thank my research supervisor Dr. Dilum Bandara, Senior Lecturer of the Department of Computer Science and Engineering, University of Moratuwa, for the continuous support, encouragement, and attention extended to me in realizing the research objectives.

Then I wish to thank our research coordinator Dr. Chandana Gamage, Senior Lecturer of the Department of Computer Science and Engineering, University of Moratuwa, for the continuous encouragement extended to me in realizing the research objectives.

I wish to convey my special gratitude to respondents of the boutique hotels who gave me their precious time and valuable insights in making this research a reality. Furthermore, I extend my earnest thanks to batch mates and friends for the guidance and resources provided in bringing this study a success.

My heartfelt appreciation goes to my loving parents, for all the encouragement, care and unconditional support given to me throughout the good and bad times during this research.

Finally, I wish to convey my heartfelt thanks to all those who helped me in many ways for bringing this study a success.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

CBSL	Central Bank of Sri Lanka
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
SLTDA	Sri Lanka Tourism Development Authority
SMM	Social Media Marketing
WWW	World Wide Web

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

Sri Lankan Hospitality and Tourism industry has shown rapid growth since the end of its three-decade-long civil conflict in May 2009. The tourism sector has emerged as a frontrunner in Sri Lanka's economic activities. According to Central Bank of Sri Lanka (CBSL) in 2011 statistics, the hotel industry contributed around 2% to the country's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) (*Ensuring Sustainability in Sri Lanka's Growing Hotel Industry*, 2013). In 2016, the services sector grew by 4.2 % accounting for 56.5% of GDP (Indraratna, 2017). Sri Lanka is on its way to becoming a major tourist destination in South Asia. A sector that is positioned to benefit directly from the anticipated boom in tourism is the Sri Lankan hotel industry.

The Sri Lanka Tourism Development Authority (SLTDA) has encouraged investors to launch luxury boutique hotels and tourist attractions in the North and East of the island while anticipating further growth in the leisure industry. According to SLTDA figures, Sri Lanka's tourist arrivals in 2016 rose by 14% with the arrival of 2,050,832 tourists compared to the 1,798,380 tourists arrived in 2015. Also, SLTDA states that worldwide, global tourism rebounded strongly, with the growth of international tourist arrivals by 3.9% in 2016 to a total of 1,235 million from 1,189 million in 2015. The highest growth of all regions with 8.4% was recorded from Asia & Pacific in 2016. India, China, United Kingdom, Germany, Maldives, France, Australia, Russia, U.S.A., and Canada are the top ten source markets for Sri Lanka during both 2015 & 2016 (*Annual Statistical Report of Sri Lanka Tourism - 2016*, 2017).

SLTDA classifies the tourist accommodation sector into four distinct categories, namely Boutique Villas and Hotels, Guesthouses, Home Stay Units/Bungalows/Rented Homes and Apartments, and Tourist Hotels (*Classification of Tourist Hotels*, 2017). *Boutique hotel* is a popular term to describe sometimes luxurious or unique and unusual hotel environments. Boutique hotels differentiate themselves from larger chain/branded hotels and motels by providing personalized accommodation and services/facilities. There are no standard classification criteria for boutique villas and hotels. Sometimes known as *design hotels* or *lifestyle hotels*, boutique hotels began appearing in the 1980s

in major cities like London, New York, and San Francisco (Boutique Villas and Hotels, 2017). Typically boutique hotels are furnished in a themed, stylish, and/or inspirational manner.

Although usually considerably smaller than mainstream hotels, often ranging from three to 100 guest rooms, some city-center boutique hotels may have several hundred. Boutique hotels are standalone and unlikely to be part of large hotel chains. They focus on tranquillity and comfort rather than gadgetry. 24-hour hotel staff often attends to guest services. Many boutique hotels have on-site dining facilities and offer bars and lounges, which may also be open to the public. The concept of boutique or designer hotels is becoming increasingly popular in Sri Lanka (Boutique Villas and Hotels, 2017).

SLTDA highlights the challenges that Sri Lankan Tourism industry is facing at the moment. During the last three years, the Sri Lankan rupee has depreciated, and globally, fuel prices and airfares have increased. As a result, Sri Lanka's appeal has declined. Today, Sri Lanka tourism faces a significantly more competitive marketing environment that continues to be more challenging due to new competitor destinations, emerging source markets (China and India), challenging distribution channels (i.e., e-commerce), broadening media options, and global recession. Although in Sri Lankan economy Tourism is a fast growing industry, with the credit crunch in 2008, tourist figures have dropped as people have less money to spend and companies are unable to expand as rapidly (Tourism in Challenging Times, 2017). Likewise, there are several issues that tourism businesses, need to overcome. These challenges are also felt by the boutique villas and hotels, and they are even more challenged due to aggressive strategies by the tourist hotels to stay afloat.

In any business to sell their products and services marketing is crucial. The need for marketing is even more important when an industry is facing both internal and external challenges. However, high investments are required to boost Sri Lanka's tourism through marketing. Social media is a viable alternative, where a collective of online communications channels dedicated to community-based input, interaction, content sharing, and collaboration are used for marketing. Websites and applications dedicated to forums, microblogging, social networking, social bookmarking, social curation, and

wikis are among the different types of social media (Rouse, 2016). Social network penetration worldwide is ever-increasing. In 2017, 71% of Internet users were social network users, and these figures are expected to grow (Statista, 2017). Social networking is one of the most popular online activities with high user engagement rates and expanding mobile possibilities.

Social Media Marketing (SMM) takes advantage of social networking to help a company increase brand exposure and broaden customer reach (Rouse, 2011). The goal is usually to create content compelling enough that users will share it with their social networks. Therefore, as one of the most potent marketing platforms, social media marketing is arguable, the best way to engage with the target audience directly and generate popularity for any brand or content.

1.2 Problem Statement

Almost all the boutique hotels in Sri Lanka have their presence on social media platforms, especially on Facebook. However, only several of them seem to be active where they post content and engage with followers. Most staff of boutique hotels are engaged in hotel's operational functions, and only a few are assigned for administrative roles. Most of the time marketing tasks are performed either by one person or by a few employees who have administrative job roles and usually are not subject experts. When it comes to SMM, there is a good probability that the required subject knowledge may not be with the hotel administrative staff. In some cases, hotels have chosen to outsource the SMM process for the hotel, especially when the boutique hotel is relatively large or multiple boutique hotels are under the same administration. However, in many cases self-driven SMM seems to prevail, though most staff engaged in social media are not the subject experts. Therefore, it is imperative to understand the challenges faced by self-driven campaigners and key factors that lead to success in marketing boutique hotels on social media. Thus, we attempt to address the following research question:

What are the critical factors that boutique type hotels in Sri Lanka should consider when doing self-driven marketing on social media?

1.3 Research Objectives

This research plans to achieve the following objectives to address the above problem statement:

- To identify prefigured factors from the literature and observations on critical success factors on SMM and boutique hotel industry to start the research process and shape the interview questions.
- To identify and explore a set of boutique hotels that utilize social media actively.
- To identify a set of factors affecting marketing campaigns on social media in the long run.
- To provide recommendations on what factors to consider while running a successful self-drive marketing initiative on social media.

1.4 Outline

Rest of the thesis is organized in the following manner. Chapter 2 presents the literature review, including social media landscape, factors affecting social media marketing, and grounded theory. The research methodology is presented in Chapter 3 where we adopt a qualitative approach based on Straussian grounded theory. Data collected based on interviews are then analyzed in Chapter 4. Concluding remarks, limitations of the research, and future work are presented in Chapter 5.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter presents literature on social media, social media marketing, Sri Lankan boutique hotel industry and literature in grounded theory research. Section 2.1 presents an overview of social media, while social media marketing is presented in Section 2.2. Section 2.3 presents an overview of the boutique hotel industry in Sri Lankan landscape. Grounded theory research literature is presented in Section 2.4.

2.1 Social Media

The term social media is a known to all most all Internet users. Nevertheless, there seems to be confusion among managers and academic researchers alike as to what exactly should be included under this term, and how social media differ from the seemingly-interchangeable related concepts of Web 2.0 and user-generated content. Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) refer *social media* as a group of Internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0, and that allow the creation and exchange of user-generated content. Rouse (2016) provides a more detailed definition, where it says Social Media is the collective of online communications channels dedicated to community-based input, interaction, content-sharing and collaboration. Websites and applications dedicated to forums, microblogging, social networking, social bookmarking, social curation, and wikis are among the different types of social media.

Social media gives the possibility to meet new people and keep in touch with people from the comfort of your own home, which actually resulted from the sheer power of the Internet. The appeal social media has is undeniable. To access anyone, anywhere in the world, is a powerful thing (Banner, 2017).

Another key aspect that makes social media so successful is the way it is designed. Especially the user interface of these platforms is very user-friendly to all age groups. For example, everyone from teenagers to grandparents have figured out how to use Facebook. Social media companies have managed to make it so simple and easy to use that it reaches any demographic (Banner, 2017).

The entry to social media and using it does not cost. People will immediately try something if it is free, which is why these platforms are so successful. They offer these amazing features and connectivity without the hassle of paying for it. Their earnings are from the advertising costs and paid games on the platform, but the entry fee is zero (Banner, 2017).

Today social media has become a part of daily life. Social media has changed the way we communicate, gather, and share information starting from early days of newsgroups and the introduction of early chat rooms. Today social media has facilitated us to build a connected global society. Looking at the social media evolution, we could consider that the Golden Era of social media started in 2001. Starting from 2001, there was a constant stream of social innovation that started with the first crowdsourced encyclopedia, Wikipedia. Wikipedia was followed by Friendster in 2002, LinkedIn in 2002, MySpace in 2003, Facebook in 2004, and Twitter in 2006 (Morrison, 2015). Instagram was launched in 2010 for iOS users and in 2012 for Android users (Instagram, 2017). Google+ was launched in 2011 (Google+, 2017). As of 2017, there are thousands of social media platforms. Some platforms are more popular than others, but each platform has a loyal audience, no matter however small. For example, Instagram caters to an audience that communicates through photographs while Twitter is perfect for those who like to keep their communication to the point (Rangwala, 2017).

The leading social networks are usually available in multiple languages and enable users to connect with friends or people across geographical, political, or economic borders. While 2.46 million unique users are on social media as of 2017, this number is expected to rise to 3.02 by 2021. In 2017, 71.0% of Internet users were social network users (Statista, 2017). Social networking is one of the most popular online activities with high user engagement rates and expanding mobile possibilities. Most social networks are also available as mobile social apps, whereas some networks have been optimized for mobile internet browsing. With over 1.86 billion monthly active users, social network Facebook is currently the market leader in terms of reach and scope (Statista, 2017). Due to a constant presence in the lives of their users, social networks have a decidedly strong social impact.

2.2 Social Media Marketing

Social media marketing is the process of gaining traffic or attention of the users through social media platforms. In other words, we can say that the use of social media platforms to promote product and services is social media marketing (Stelzner, 2013). Furthermore, social media marketing carries the advantages of low cost, rapid transmission through a wide community, and user interaction (Vance et al., 2009), therefore most companies are becoming actively involved in social media, which also shows the emergence of social media sites as innovative marketing or promotion platform that is also known as social media marketing.

Social media platforms offer a way for businesses to bring their brand online and spread awareness. There is also the potential for those same companies to engage their customers online and handle customer service issues quickly. The options for paid advertising are also extremely varied. Companies can utilize targeted options to reach the exact people they are seeking. The options are practically limitless, which leaves plenty of opportunities for businesses to take advantage of these platforms (Banner, 2017). Hence, businesses tend to use social media marketing over traditional marketing, and it is considered to be the way to promote products and services in the 21st century (Manis, 2014).

2.2.1 Relevance of Social Media Marketing to Hospitality Industry

The use of social Internet outlets has become widespread, and customers use the social media to express their good experiences as well as the downside (DeMers, 2014). This is a very important detail for established companies because it will help improve the marketing of the business leading to the company's benefit. Since individuals have created the use of social media through communication, it enables the company's management to have a relationship with the most important element of their success, the guests.

Proper use of SMM helps to increase hotel website traffic. SMM improves the brand reach for the hotel and provides awareness for products or services to the targeted audience. It helps to generate leads. Helps to create organic reach through many social shares for hotel's content. SMM builds friendly social communities for the brand. SMM let hotel to harness meaningful relationships with their customers. At the same time, it

lets hotel to have a better understanding of their audience. Another advantage is social media let hotel to target their clients' demographics more effectively according to their business strategy.

2.2.2 Factors Affecting Social Media Marketing

Businesses create accounts on each popular social network such as Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, without a clear idea on which social media platform will bring the most return (Daoud, 2016). Businesses waste time on the wrong platforms without gaining maximum benefit from the social media. Hence, businesses need to be known which platform is the best for business and what factors to be considered when selecting a platform to get the maximum benefit. Therefore, the platform is another factor to be considered to get the maximum benefit from marketing on social media.

There are different modes of communication using social media such as text, links, images, and videos (Lindsey, 2015). In some cases, there is only one best mode of communication, but in many cases, there are multiple modes to most effectively deliver the message. Compared to text, images help to capture the audience attention and bring more viewers to the campaign (DeMers, 2013). At the point when there is a long post with only text, it can turn many users away because they do not like to read due to time waste. However, incorporating images allow grabbing attention and it is the perfect way to encourage users to explore content in greater detail (DeMers, 2013). Images can get more engagement with Twitter, Facebook, and LinkedIn. Some newest social networks such as Instagram, Snapchat and Pinterest are based entirely on images (Schaffer, 2016). As people like to watch and listen rather than reading the text, videos can be used to explain everything and boost conversions and sales (Moritz, 2015). Hence, the mode of communication is also an important factor to be considered when marketing on social media.

When to post items on social media is a key factor as the number of reactions received for a post depends on the time of day, the day of the week, and seasonality (Patel, 2015). Every marketer expects maximum engagement for the posts shared on social media platforms. Therefore, they have to go where the crowd is and when they are online and active. Hence, businesses need to know what the best time of the day is according to the platform selected (Schaffer, 2016). For example, it is known that more reactions

are received during evenings and weekends (Bagadiya, 2016). The audience is another factor, as social media enables targeted marketing to specific audiences based on their gender, age, likings, and social status. When the business knows intended interest group, then it is easier and less expensive to target them via social media (Daoud, 2016). Third party resources and social media marketing tools can make it easier to run a campaign more productively and effectively (Daoud, 2016). Several services are needed to start a promotional campaign on social media. Hence, getting those services from reputed service providers could reduce to cost (e.g., on employees, advertisement creation and follow up, and giveaways) and risk (Sean, 2016). Therefore, resources that a business needs to start and continue a marketing campaign is another factor.

If the online networking is a part of the business methodology, then the business has to adhere to social networking laws and regulations (Rothwell, 2016). There are set of rules defined by social media platforms what businesses should do and do not when market on social media (James, 2014). There are some governments around the world such as America, China, Bhutan, etc., defined rules and regulations for the use of social media and social media marketing (Department of Information and Media Ministry of Information and Communications, 2016). The organizations have to consider about government and platform rules and regulations to market on social media. Hence, these factors indirectly effect on the success of sales promotion campaigns on social media both good and bad ways.

2.3 Sri Lankan Boutique Hotel Industry

The topic of boutique hotels is a fashionable trend in Sri Lanka. They may feature local architecture, interior designs, handicrafts, etc., and all have a flavor of Sri Lanka. The booming tourist industry has seen many a private home, some with colonial architecture, renovated and redesigned and being open to tourists (Boutique Hotels, 2017).

Boutique hotel is a popular term to describe sometimes luxurious or unique and unusual hotel environments. Boutique hotels differentiate themselves from larger chain/branded hotels and motels by providing personalized accommodation and services/facilities. There are no standard classification criteria for boutique villas and hotels. Sometimes

known as *design hotels* or *lifestyle hotels*, boutique hotels began appearing in the 1980s in major cities like London, New York, and San Francisco (Boutique Villas and Hotels, 2017). Typically, boutique hotels are furnished in a themed, stylish and inspirational manner.

Although usually considerably smaller than mainstream hotels, often ranging from three to 100 guest rooms, some city-center boutique hotels may have several hundred. Boutique hotels are standalone and unlikely to be part of large hotel chains. They focus on tranquillity and comfort rather than gadgetry. 24-hour hotel staff often attends to guest services. Many boutique hotels have on-site dining facilities and offer bars and lounges, which may also be open to the public. The concept of boutique or designer hotels is becoming increasingly popular in Sri Lanka (Boutique Villas and Hotels, 2017).

2.4 Grounded Theory Research

Glaser and Strauss proposed a new kind of qualitative research in 1967, and they named it as grounded theory. It is a systematic methodology to construct a theory through analysis of data (William, 2012). A study conducted using grounded theory likely to begin with a collection of qualitative data to generate a theory mapped closely to the data, and this method is unlike to positive research (William, 2012). The new method was introduced to enable systematic collection of data, coding them, and analysis of data. Glaser and Strauss said that this method was usable in quantitative research also, but they focused on qualitative research due to the suitability of developing method from data. Mainly there are three key elements of the grounded theory, namely systematic obtaining of data, constant comparative method of qualitative analysis, and generation of theory. The purpose of this method is to generate unified theory based on the ideas generating throughout the process.

Grounded theory method involves interacting closely with data and building a new theory from data instead of following hypotheses formed or preconceived theories. Mainly, there are two kinds of grounded theories; substantive and formal. Specific area of the study go under substantive theory, and the focus of this research is on a specific area that is about to identify critical success factors to conduct marketing initiatives on

social media. Glaser and Strauss (1967) mentioned that both formal and substantive theories must be grounded in data.

Grounded theory avoids applying formal theories before collecting data and to generate substantive theory from the data itself and avoid forcing the data to fit into preconceived theories. The goal of grounded theory is to generate a theory that fits data and works practically. Moreover, the generation of theory must be during the research process not before or not after the research process. A grounded theory approach is well suited to identify critical success factors in marketing initiatives on social media because it can be done by analyzing data, which will be gathered from boutique hotels. The way in which the boutique hotels conduct their marketing initiatives can vary from one to another, and they may have a different kind of processes as well. Therefore, it is essential to analyze data before making any decisions.

Marshall and Rossman (1999) mentioned that qualitative researchers are messy because they do not start with a neat set of known elements to be compared to objective reality. However, in grounded theory, this messiness is an advantage to focus on data.

Glaser and Strauss introduced the grounded theory in 1967, and a few versions of grounded theory are introduced up to now. Glaser's approach (1978, 1992) is known as the classic (Glaserian) grounded theory and Strauss's approach (1987, 1990, and 1998) is known as Straussian Grounded Theory and Charmaz approach (2008) is known as Charmaz or Constructivist Grounded Theory (Ross, 2014). The Straussian-grounded theory allows a literature review (Corbin and Strauss, 2008). Classic grounded theory should be avoided to keep the process of new theory generation free from preconceived ideas. Use of literature with different versions of grounded theory is presented in Table 2.1 (Ross, 2014).

Table 2.1: Different versions of the grounded theory.

Classic/ Glaserian Grounded Theory (1978; 1992; 1998)	Straussian Grounded Theory (1987;1990; 1998)	Charmaz/ Constructivist Grounded Theory (2006)
An early study of literature review should be avoided for substantive area and strictly related areas.	Allow early study of literature review. No need to go through all of the literature in the area.	Convince to delaying the early study of literature review to allow researcher to compose their ideas but suggest incorporating literature review in the research process.
Allow extant literature for comparative analysis when the core category appears, and the theory is well developed.	Literature can use ongoing research process and it can be used as a secondary data source or for comparison with the data.	Extant literature can be used to clarify the ideas and make comparisons.
Extant literature in the early stage can detract researcher's attention from what researcher want to do with data.	If extant literature stands between the researcher and data, then it hinders creativity.	If it is necessary to use extant literature, then it has to be used without letting it distract creativity or block the theory generation.
Literature review should be incorporated into the analysis as data if it is already done.	The literature can help to define properties and dimensions to concept development and direct theoretical sampling.	The literature helps to identify the connection between current research and previous studies related same area and identify significant findings.
Researcher's theoretical sensitivity gets distracted if he or she is engaged with the literature in the substantive area, but it enhances theoretical sensitivity with other areas.	Engaging with literature can help formulate research questions and improve theoretical sensitivity.	

Straussian grounded theory allow to use an early review of the literature, also mentioned that there is no need to review all the literature based on the subject. Literature can be used as a secondary source of data and researcher can engage with literature concerning ongoing research processes. According to Strauss, literature help for theoretical sampling, concept development and defining properties and dimensions. Moreover, it helps to improve theoretical sensitivity and to formulate research questions. Thornberg (2012) mentioned the effectiveness of using a literature review even in a classic grounded theory research project. Strauss and Corbin (1990) accepted that an initial literature review may be needed and can be used without preventing the researcher's open approach to data collection and theory generation. This study used a literature review for many purposes. Literature helps to identify the direction of the

research and to build theoretical sampling. Research questions were also built by taking help from literature.

2.5 Summary

The boutique hotel industry in Sri Lanka shows an upward trend while receiving government encouragement as well. The boutique hotel industry is one of many major contributors to Sri Lankan economy. The industry's main focus is on international tourist population arriving in Sri Lanka for revenue generation. The characteristics of social media are well suited to address the expectations of any marketing initiative. The cost of social media marketing is comparatively less than the traditional marketing methods. From all social networks available, Facebook is proven as the market leader in terms of reach and scope. With the current trend, people expect social presence from companies also in social media. Therefore, having an active social presence in social media will provide the required competitive advantage to the businesses.

We found five factors through literature review and observations, and these can mainly contribute to a successful marketing initiative on social media. Those are the mode of engagement, active audience, timing, and resources. We also found that platform rules, regulations, and government constraints can be affected by the strength of the relationship between the independent and dependent factors.

3. METHODOLOGY

This chapter presents the research methodology, prefigured factors, how the boutique hotel sample was selected, how the data collection was carried out for the research and finally how the data analysis was conducted. Section 3.1 presents the relationship between qualitative research and Straussian Grounded-Theory. The prefigured factors along with dependent, independent and moderating factors are presented in Section 3.2. Section 3.3 presents the selection of boutique hotels. Section 3.4 presents data collection process in detail. Section 3.5 presents the question formulation for interviews. Section 3.6 presents the theoretical sampling. Lastly, section 3.7 presents how the data analysis will be conducted.

3.1 Qualitative Research and Straussian Grounded-Theory

We conducted interviews to gather data and followed a Straussian grounded-theory (Corbin & Strauss, 2008) based design to guide the collection and coding of interview data to identify emerging categories and generate critical factors to be considered. The Straussian-grounded theory is different from the classical grounded theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) because it allows a literature review. According to Strauss, literature helps theoretical sampling, concept development, and defining properties and dimensions. Moreover, it helps to improve theoretical sensitivity and to formulate research questions (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). Whereas classic-grounded theory does not recommend the use of literature to keep the process of new theory generation free from preconceived ideas (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). As literature can be used as a secondary source of data and researcher can engage with literature during the research process, we used the literature review to identify the direction of the research and to build theoretical sampling. Moreover, research questions were built based on the related work.

Figure 3.1 shows the proposed research methodology framework. Direction of the research, variables identification, and forming the questionnaire for interviews were determined by referring to literature. Both literature and author's own observations were used to identify prefigured categories. Interview questions were derived based on

the prefigured categories. Then a set of boutique hotels and their marketing initiatives on social media was selected for the analysis. Respective marketing personnel at the respective boutique hotels were then interviewed for their conduct on social media. Data gathered from the interview were analyzed by coding, categorizing, comparing, and memo writing of the interview responses. Critical factors were finally determined based on the data analysis.

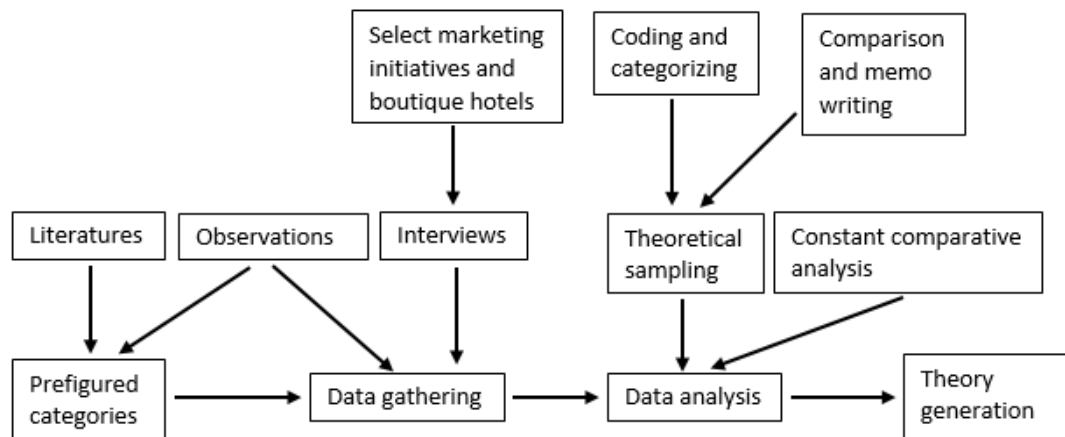


Figure 3.1: Methodology framework.

Almost all the boutique hotels in Sri Lanka have their presence on social media platforms, especially on Facebook. However, only several of them can be seen as active in them. Therefore, it is essential to define a selection criteria for boutique hotels based on their level of engagement on social media.

A quantitative approach was not utilized for this study as data mainly consists of the experiences, struggles, and achievements of these boutique hotels, which are unique to themselves. Hence, we focused on a qualitative approach where the conduct of SMM of each boutique hotel will be taken as a case and is analyzed according to the interview content. Qualitative research helps to gather more details in different areas, and grounded theory helped to analyze those to identify critical factors. Research studies dealing with critical factors have often relied on prefigured categories to start data collection and form the questionnaire for interviews.

3.2 Prefigured Factors

A set of factors were found through the literature review as potential factors that could affect the success of marketing initiatives of boutique hotels on social media. These factors can be categorized as a mode of engagement, active audience, timing, and resources. Table 3.1 shows the independent variables, moderating variables, and the dependent variable according to the initial literature.

Table 3.1: Dependent, moderating and independent factors.

Independent	Moderating	Dependent
Mode of engagement e.g., platform, images, videos, and pages (Daoud, 2016; Schaffer, 2016; Lindsey, 2015; DeMers, 2013; Moritz, 2015)	Platform rules and regulations (Rothwell, 2016; James, 2014)	Successful marketing initiatives on social media
Active Audience (Daoud, 2016; Schaffer, 2016)	Government rules and regulations (Department of Information and Media Ministry of Information and Communications, 2016)	
Timing e.g., Time of day, month, and year (Patel, 2015; Schaffer, 2016; Bagadiya, 2016)		
Resources <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Essential needs • Cost for resources (Sean, 2016; Daoud, 2016)		

3.2.1 Dependent Factors

Successful marketing initiatives on social media is the dependent factor of this study, which responds to the changes in independent and moderating factors. The final goal is to have successful marketing initiatives on social media, and this will not change throughout the study.

3.2.2 Independent Factors

The independent factors are uncovered through reviewing literature and observations. Table 3.2 shows the derivation of independent factors through open coding and axial coding. These factors have a direct impact on the dependent factor.

There are many social media platforms and businesses create accounts on each popular social network without a clear idea on which platform will bring the most return

(Daoud, 2016). There are different modes of communication to publish promotions on social media platforms such as text, links, images, and videos (Lindsey, 2015). Images help to capture the audience attention and bring more viewers to the campaign compared to text (DeMers, 2013). Videos can be used to explain everything and boost conversions and sales (Moritz, 2015). When to post items on social media is a key factor as the number of reactions received for, a post depends on the time of day, the day of the week, and seasonality (Bagadiya, 2016; Patel, 2015). The audience is another factor, as social media enables targeted marketing to specific audiences based on their gender, age, likings, and social status (Daoud, 2016). Several services are needed to start a marketing initiative on social media (Sean, 2016).

Table 3.2: Derivation of independent factors through open and axial coding.

Selected	Axial	Open
Mode of engagement	Platform	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Businesses tend to make accounts on each famous social media platform. • Businesses do not inquire which platform will bring the most return. • Business must avoid wasting time in the wrong places. • Choosing the right place is very important
	Images	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Different types of mode of communication text, links, images, and videos. • Images help to capture the audience attention. • Images get more views to the campaign. • Big trend with image-centric marketing rather than text-based.
	Videos	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Famous mode of communication is video. • An easy way to show how to do something. • People like to watch and listen rather than reading plain text. • Video can be used to explain everything. • Video boosts conversions and sales.
	Social network Pages	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Social networks allow having separate pages for different purposes. • Businesses can use “pages” to market products and services.
Timing	Time of the year/ month/ day	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Right time for the campaign is more important. • The best time of the year for the campaign. • Best days of the week to promote. • Best time of the day to post.
Active Audience	Customers to target	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The first thing business needs to look at is an audience. • Better to identify the ideal customers to the market.

Resources	Essential needs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There are general services need to start a promotional campaign.
	Cost of resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • General services cost for the business. • Employees, advertisement creation and follow up, giveaways, etc.

Boutique hotels have to consider several factors to start and continue a marketing initiative on social media, and those factors include the mode of engagement, active audience, timing, and resources. These factors directly affect the success of the marketing initiative, therefore; they are factors categorized as independent factors.

3.2.3 Moderating Factors

Moderating factors are those that affect the strength of the relationship between the independent and dependent factors. Table 3.3 shows the derivation of moderate factors through open coding and axial coding. As with any marketing initiative on the hospitality industry, regulatory requirements and media regulations also apply to social media marketing (James, 2014; Rothwell, 2016). Moreover, the chosen social media platform may have its own set of laws and regulations, e.g., ads posted on Facebook cannot have a lot of text. Therefore, these rules and regulations may also have an effect on the success of social media initiatives.

Table 3.3: Derivation of moderate factors through open and axial coding.

Selected	Axial	Open
Platform rules and regulations	Platform rules and regulations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Businesses must adhere to social networking laws and regulations. • There are set of rules what businesses should do and do not with social media.
Government constraints	General rules to consider	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There is guidance to identify the rules, regulations, and risks of social media for any institution in general. • Some governments around the world defined rules and regulations for the use of social media and social media marketing.

3.3 Selection of Boutique Hotels

With over 1.86 billion monthly active users, social network Facebook is currently the market leader in terms of reach and scope (Statista, 2017). The literature shows Facebook as the worldwide most popular social media platform where most active users

can be found. Hence, we decided to select our boutique hotels sample for interviews based on SMM initiatives on the Facebook platform. We started looking at the social media presence of Sri Lankan boutique hotels. Initially, we looked at 159 boutique hotels. Out of them, 146 boutique hotels had a Facebook page with their business details. Then we checked those Facebook page for “Page Likes” and “Page Followed” counts and took the ones that have both Likes and Follows more than 1,000 to a particular date. To which we found 108 boutique hotels. Then we checked the timestamp of the most recent post by the page administrator for all those Facebook Pages. As our intention was to identify active Facebook pages, we decided to only consider the pages having the timestamp of their most recent post at minimum a date in November 2017, since the timestamp checking conducted at the beginning of December 2017. To which we found 81 boutique hotels. Then we counted the number of Posts by the page administrator for each boutique hotel for the last three months, i.e., between September and November 2017. We experienced a lot of variance in this count. For example, during our exercise number of times we saw although the count is high for the month, sometimes many posts were posted on the same day which tends to misguide us to think that throughout the month there were posts/engagement from the page administrator. However, as we focus on Pages with frequent engagements, we tried to look at Pages having administrator Posts with a gap no more than one week. To which we found nine boutique hotels. To increase the numbers, we then looked at Pages having administrator Posts posted with at least one post per week on average. Then we were able to increase the number of boutique hotels to 19. Hence, respective boutique hotels who own each Facebook page were selected for the sample. The selection criteria for the boutique hotels sample can be summarised as follows:

- Having a Facebook page for the boutique hotel;
- Pages with more than 1,000 Page Likes and Page Follows; and
- Pages having administrator Posts posted with a gap of at most one week between September and November; or
- Pages having administrator posts posted at least once per week between September and November, even with a gap between two Posts being more than a week apart.

On inquiry, it was found that two boutique hotels in the sample come under one group where the same person is maintaining Facebook and other SMM activities for both boutique hotels. Three boutique hotels refused our request for an interview. Five boutique hotels did not respond back to our requests for interview appointments. Thus, the final number of participations was ten. Table 3.4 summarizes how the sample size is determined.

Table 3.4: Determination of sample size.

Initial Number	Criteria 1	Criteria 2	Criteria 3	Criteria 4	Sample Size
159	146	108	9	19	10

3.4 Data Collection

Data collection strategy for this research is interviewing key stakeholders from boutique hotels who are involved in running SMM on behalf of their hotel. Accordingly, ten people from different boutique hotels in Sri Lanka were taken as respondents for the study. The target population for this study is the responsible persons for SMM in respective boutique hotels. The quantitative approach is not suitable for this study as most of the experiences, struggles, and achievements of these hotels are unique to themselves. Hence, this study focuses on a qualitative approach where SMM approach of each boutique hotel will be taken as a case and analyzed according to the interview content.

Data gathering is the most critical part of this study, and it is carried out through a set of interviews. Interviews were conducted with the target population, which was identified by going through a set of Facebook Pages of different boutique hotels in Sri Lanka. Interview questions (see Appendix A) were formed based on the literature and observations on how boutique hotels conduct marketing on social media, specifically on Facebook. The open-ended questions were used to get detail information from the interviewee. An interview request email (see Appendix C) were sent out to the target group. Furthermore, publicly available hotel's contact details and personal contacts were used to obtain appointments for interviews.

As this study was guided through Straussian grounded theory, which emphasizes the importance of coding data and memo writing as soon as an interview is concluded, the interviews were manually recorded and coded immediately after every interview. Hence, findings from initial interviews could help to form the questions for subsequent interviews and questions were revised as shown in Appendix B.

In this research, the author personally conducted the interviews and interacted with the respondents either in face-to-face interviews or on telephone interviews. Some of the features observed during the interviews were tone of voice and body language. Such observations were too recorded in the notes or memos, which were used to analyze data. Further interviews were carried out using personal interaction skills and framing the questions in a proper manner, which were found to be equally important. Each interview took approximately 30 minutes.

3.5 Questions for Interview

In this research study, the interview is the main method for data collection. There are three important approaches to interview; those are expecting the unexpected, asking a limited number of closed questions to get background details, and asking primarily open questions (Sunstein, Chiseri, & Strater, 2012). Open questions are for multiple answers and encourage respondents to communicate their perspective freely. Research can get detail information with open questions and in a conversational style. This research used many opened questions get detail answers for each of them. The list of questions in Appendix A and B consists of semi-structured, open-ended questions. After the initial round of interviews and coding the interview responses, questions were revised based on the responses where it was realized some codes are appearing again and again, and a few questions are not relevant given the context of self-driven SMM adopted by the practitioners. Revised questions are given in Appendix B.

3.6 Theoretical Sampling

Theoretical sampling is central to grounded theory design, and it is a process of deciding what data to collect next while collecting, coding, and analyzing the data (Glaser &

Strauss, 1967). Initially, interview procedure of data collection conducted simply on the problem area without a theoretical framework. After starting the analysis and coding during the data collection process, further sections for sampling are guided by the data needs. In this research, theoretical sampling was done through a selection of boutique hotels which have an active social media presence to be interviewed and through theoretical control of the form of an interview. The interview and questions had to shape based on previous responses. Moreover, questions and order of questions had to be changed based on theoretical sampling. Comments from previous interviews were used to get more details from the respondents. The last few interviews were conducted to verify information collected including little additional information because theoretical saturation was largely achieved.

Theoretical saturation is the point at which no additional data is needed to the researcher to move forward. The success of theoretical sampling lies in reaching theoretical saturation (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Data collection can be stopped when there are repeated instances of similar data and this indicates that the researcher does not hear anything new from the interviews or data collection (Breckenridge & Jones, 2009).

3.7 Data Analysis

There should be a distinct process to controlled methodology (Glaser & Strauss, 1967); therefore, Straussian grounded theory is used to analyze unstructured data to bring meaning and ultimately develop a theory. This section describes coding, comparative analysis, and the generating of theory.

3.7.1 Constant Comparative Analysis

The constant comparative analysis is a controlled methodology for analyzing data in grounded theory research. The purpose of this analysis is to note similarities and differences that enable coding and generation of categories and theories. This method is constant because the researcher must return to the beginning and continue analysis in each phase and researcher can find similarities and differences by coding and writing memos in each phase. The researcher must constantly engage in the process of analyzing, comparing, and extracting information from data.

3.7.2 Coding

Coding is a vital to link between collecting data and generating a theory. It is the backbone for the analysis with grounded theory (Charmaz, 2006). According to Corbin and Strauss (2008) the research should begin with open coding then axial coding which develops from open coding and selective coding. Open coding is one of the processes in analyzing textual contents, and it includes breaking data into parts, examining closely, comparing and contrasting, and developing categories (Khandkar, 2015). Open coding uses words, statements, and phrases from data collected to develop concepts. These indicators are constantly compared with data being collected to identify new insights until theoretical saturation is reached (William, 2012).

3.7.3 Category and Memo

Continuously creating coding may result in many pages of codes. Therefore, we must analyze those and find the similarities to group them into categories. Subcategories can be created from the codes if necessary and then link them to categories. Category or subcategory name can be different from the codes to express its scope better (Khandkar, 2015). In this study, many coding styles were identified with literature review and categorized them under various categories to form interview questions to collect data from the boutique hotels.

LaRossa (2005) explained that core category has the highest number of strongest links to other categories. It is the category at theoretical saturation and centrally relevant to build theory. The core category is the principal point for the generation of theory. Corbin and Strauss (2008) mentioned that core category has analytic power because it can explain what the research is all about. In the research process, the researcher is looking for something special that would link with all the other categories to create a theory, and that is called the main or king category. In our research, main or king category is the “successful marketing initiative on social media”.

Memo writing is a pivotal aspect of open coding because open coding with few words is not enough to describe the concept often. The notes that are written based on the open coding and the analysis of gathered data is called a memo. A memo contains a set of sentences, paragraph, or even more if needed (Khandkar, 2015).

Axial coding and selective coding are also essential components of the grounded theory. Axial coding is identifying the relationship among the open codes within a category. Selective coding is identifying the core category and relating all other categories to the selected category. This core category becomes the guide to further theoretical sampling and data collection, and finally, the theory is generated based on this category.

3.7.4 Generating Theory

Generation of the theory depends on the conceptual categories and identifying the core categories. Glaser and Strauss (1967) argued that hypotheses need to be built before generating a theory. In such case, they pointed out that the researcher should find everything important and that work quickly leads to the generation of the hypothesis. Generation of the theory is the next phase after generation of hypotheses and created concepts and categories involved in developing a new theory.

Sometimes it may be difficult to generate theory, concepts, and categories with the collected data. Corbin and Strauss (2008) explained that it is necessary to write a memo to locate more important ideas that will help to generate proper concept, categories, and the theory from the data collected. In general, data need to be analyzed properly to generate a theory. Corbin and Staruss (2008) argued that the theory can be generated even by a sole case and research should identify categories and generate theories based on them.

The process of generating theory from the data involves data collection, coding, and data analysis simultaneously. It is important to be aware of the entire process from the beginning of data until generating a theory by the researcher. Coding is an important part of the research, and it may affect the next interview as well. It may also lead to a novel approach to analysis (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Sunstein & Chiseri-Strater, 2012).

3.8 Summary

We propose to use a qualitative analysis based on interviews to gather data and identify critical factors affecting the success of marketing initiatives on social media. We followed a Straussian grounded-theory design to guide the collection and coding of interview data to identify emerging categories and to generate critical factors to be

considered. Literature was utilized to get the direction of the research, identify variables, and form the questionnaire for interviews. Both literature and authors own observations were used to identify prefigured categories. Set of interview questions was then derived based on the prefigured categories. Then a set of boutique hotels with an active presence on social media was selected for the analysis. Respective responsible personnel for SMM were then interviewed for their conduct on social media. Data gathered from the interview was analyzed by coding, categorizing, comparing, and memo writing of the interview responses. Critical factors were finally derived through data analysis.

4. DATA ANALYSIS

The chapter presents the data analysis associated with the collected data through ten interviews and author's observations. For the data analysis, the author used the Grounded Theory, which is useful in qualitative data analysis. Section 4.1 presents the boutique hotel sample selected for the data analysis. Section 4.2 presents data analysis where the critical factors considered for SMM initiatives of boutique hotels are derived.

4.1 Boutique Hotels Selected for the Analysis

This study used interviews to gather data, and grounded theory was used to analyze the data to generate substantive theory regarding critical factors that affect market initiatives on social media in Sri Lankan boutique hotel industry. Table 4.1 lists a summary of the ten social boutique hotels selected for the analysis and profile of the interviewee. Those boutique hotels were selected based on following criteria:

- Having a Facebook page for the boutique hotel;
- Pages with more than 1,000 Page Likes and Page Follows; and
- Pages having administrator Posts posted with a gap of at most one week between September and November; or

- Pages having administrator Posts posted at least once per week between September and November, even with a gap between two Posts being more than a week apart.

While most interviews were carried out face to face, few were carried out over the phone.

Table 4.1: Summary of social presence of boutique hotels.

Name of Boutique Hotel	Page Likes	Page Follows	Posts on Nov	Posts on Oct	Posts on Sep	Interviewee
Santani Wellness Resort & Spa	6,125	6,151	15	28	24	Head of Marketing
Theva Residency	22,284	22,228	19	20	19	Managing Director/Owner
Aditya Resort	13,710	13,669	5	5	5	Marketing Executive
The Sooriya Village	10,259	10,335	18	29	35	CEO/Owner
Amaranthé Bay Resort & Spa	5,871	5,865	4	8	17	Marketing Manager & Guest Relation Officer
The golden crown hotel	8,993	9,084	38	43	22	Sales & Marketing Executive
Colombo Court Hotels & Spa	25,421	25,294	15	18	17	Marketing Executive
Buckingham Place	5,527	5,532	7	8	6	Sales & Reservation Executive
Living Heritage Koslanda	4,467	4,471	32	46	45	General Manager
Cantaloupe Hotels	5,179	5,188	31	36	31	Marketing Executive

4.2 Data Analysis

Once the first interview was completed, the keywords and key sentences were extracted as open coding, and the memos were written based on them. The constant comparative analysis was used from the second interview onwards, and the author had to edit, add, and remove a set of questions and change the sequence before going to the next interview. Comments from previous interviews were used to get more details from the respondents. Axial coding was generated based on the open coding collected from data gathered, and finally, main categories (selected coding) were taken out after analyzing the axial coding. A scale from zero to three (zero was considered as not applicable, one

as disagree, two as neutral, and three as agree) was utilized to check and confirm these axial coding and final categories. The factors that got more than 50% as agreed or strongly agreed were categorized as factors to consider when performing marketing on social media. The factor selection matrix is given in Appendix D. Based on this process identified a set of independent and moderating categories listed in Table 4.2 as the key factors to be considered in when performing SMM for the boutique hotel industry.

Table 4.2: Key finding independent and moderating factors.

Independent	Moderating	Dependent
Target audience	Company policies	Successful marketing initiatives on social media
Platform for communication	Platform rules and regulations	
Mode of communication		
Maintaining engagement		
Audience reach		
Timing		
Resources <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Funds • In-house/outsource resources 		

4.2.1 Deriving Independent Factors

Table 4.3 shows how “Target audience” was derived through open coding and axial coding. Once the final category selection exercise (see Appendix D) was conducted the target audience categories in Figure 4.1 were validated. Hence, Target audience is selected as one of the factors Sri Lankan boutique hotels need to consider during their SMM initiatives.

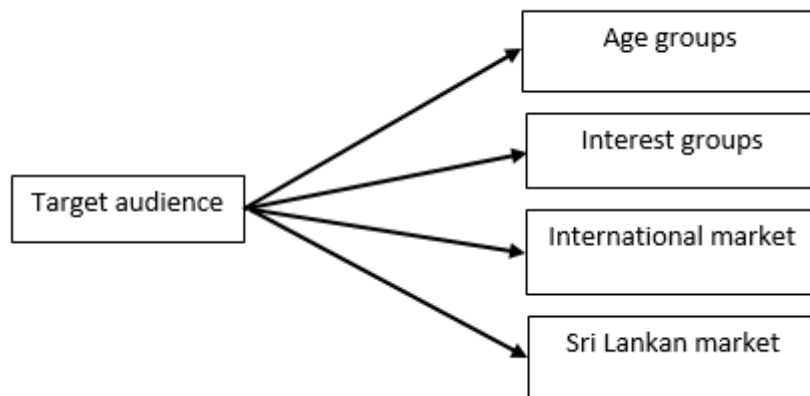


Figure 4.1: Target audience to be considered.

Facebook is considered to have the most diversity in age groups. Hence, hotels hope to have capture all those age groups by using Facebook as required for the occasion. All boutique hotels target Very high-end luxury clientele to afford their services. Restaurants of boutique hotels located at urban area target local crowd after office and during lunch. Some hotels target travelers, honeymooners, couples, etc., for their different holiday package promotions. Boutique hotels target international markets during tourism peak season and local markets during tourism off season.

Table 4.3 Open and axial coding for target audience.

Selected Coding	Axial Coding	Open Coding
Target audience	Age groups	Everybody who use Facebook
		Young generation
	Interest groups	Art enthusiasts
		Honeymooners
		Couples
		Families
		Travelers
		Very high-end luxury clientele.
		Local crowd after office and during lunch
	International market	Indians
		European countries
		USA
		UK
		Middle east
		Australia
		Germany
		China
		France
	Sri Lankan market	Local only 5% from the customer base.

Table 4.4 shows how “Platform for communication” was derived through open coding and axial coding. Once the final category selection exercise (see Appendix D) was conducted the categories in Figure 4.2 were validated as suitable platforms for communication. Hence, Platform for communication is selected as one of the factors Sri Lankan boutique hotels need to consider during their SMM initiatives.

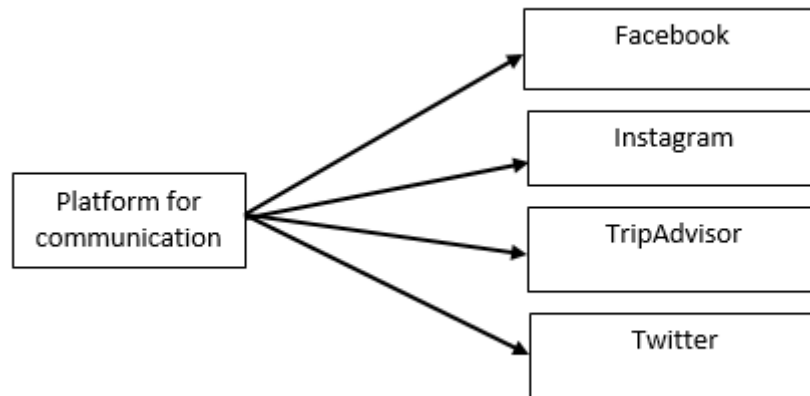


Figure 4.2: Platforms to be considered.

Facebook has the majority of any target audience. Instagram is used targeting young generation, travelers, and Europeans. TripAdvisor used to receive descriptive reviews. All boutique hotels use both Facebook and Instagram along with TripAdvisor as most necessary platforms for communication. Many of the hotels use Twitter linked to either Facebook or Instagram to auto update. To some extent hotels also receive feedback through online travel agents / booking engines (i.e., booking.com, agoda.co, and expedia.com). However, TripAdvisor platform seems to be the most used platform for receiving and acknowledging feedback transparently.

Table 4.4 Open and axial coding for a platform for communication.

Selected Coding	Axial Coding	Open Coding
Platform for communication	Facebook	Majority of any target audience.
		Large user base.
		Can reach a lot of people.
		Cheap way to a target audience
		5 pages for different outlets to concentrate more
		Can reach all our potential customers
		Young generation. between 16 to 30 years old
		Main platform, Lot of people there
		To improve ourselves and get ourselves more introduction.
	Instagram	Younger crowd
		very influential tool for travelers and inspirational
		Can reach a lot of people.
		To convey special events
		Works as main platforms along with Facebook
		Can reach all our potential customers when taken beside Facebook
		Travelers. between 16 to 30 years old
		Europe people
		To improve ourselves and get ourselves more introduction.
	TripAdvisor	To gauge more discussion style reviews.
		To get insightful feedback
	Twitter	To target journalists
		To give awareness of the product
		Has particular crowd. To capture them.
		Linked to Instagram to auto post
		Linked to Facebook to auto post
		To get ourselves more introduction.
	Other social media platforms	To convey special events.
		Use of Zomato for Restaurant reviews
		Use of Google+
		Use of Google My Business

Table 4.5 shows how “Mode of communication” was derived through open coding and axial coding. Once the final category selection exercise (see Appendix D) was conducted the categories in Figure 4.3 were validated as suitable modes for

communication. Hence, Mode of communication is selected as one of the factors Sri Lankan boutique hotels need to consider during their SMM initiatives.

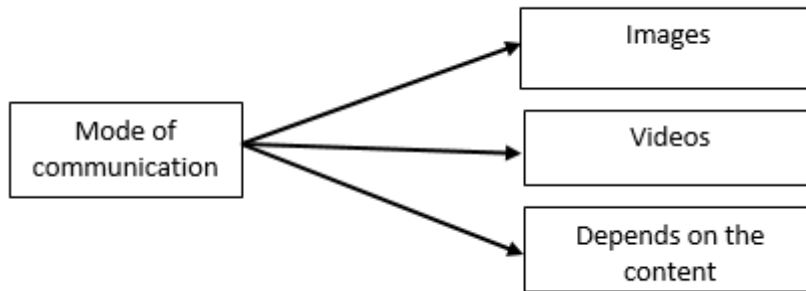


Figure 4.3: Modes of communications to be considered.

Most used mode of communication is images. Having an image in a post makes that post very noticeable. Having more images do not seem to tire the audience. Images are ideal to showcase food, hotel property, and scenic uniqueness of the hotel. Hotels use less video content comparatively. The videos are used occasionally. Videos enable people to see, watch and experience. The videos give more livelihood. Usually, videos are used to show how a service is prepared for consumption. Also depending on the content that required to show, the mode could be either an image or a video.

Table 4.5 Open and axial coding for the mode of communication.

Selected Coding	Axial Coding	Open Coding
Mode of communication	Images	Mostly used
		Always used to showcase food
		Attractive to the eye
		Having in a post very noticeable
		Having more does not bore viewers
		To showcase the scenic uniqueness
		Unedited photos should be posted. Otherwise it will not convey the true nature.
		Stunning images of the property
	Videos	Used occasionally
		Limit the video duration between 30 – 60 seconds.
		To showcase special events/moments
		Having more can bore the viewers
		Used less comparatively to images
		To showcase the property
		Special features we have
		To show what is provided to customers in service.
		People now want to see, watch and experience. The videos give more livelihood.
	Depends on the content	The uniqueness of the hotel
		Hotel brand
		The nature of the service
		What is provided to customers in a service
		Hotel staff
		Food
		Things to do by coming to location
		Activities
		Complementary services
		Most people prefer to see the view of the place, so instead of the structure concentrates more on the feeling of the place, the experience, and staff.
Customer experience		

Table 4.6 shows how “Maintaining engagement” was derived through open coding and axial coding. Once the final category selection exercise (see Appendix D) was conducted the categories in Figure 4.4 were validated as necessary factors for

maintaining engagement. Hence, Maintaining engagement is selected as one of the factors Sri Lankan boutique hotels need to consider during their SMM initiatives.

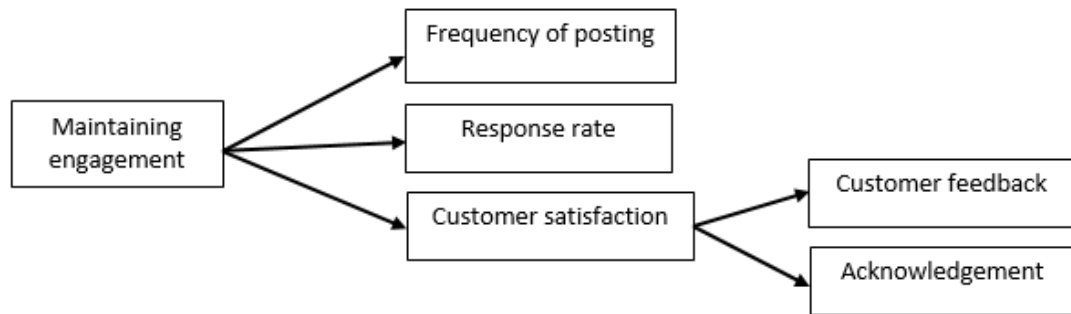


Figure 4.4: Maintaining engagement factors to be considered.

Maintaining engagement is really important to build quality relationships. People expect regular updates. Hence, Posts are posted regularly such as few times within a week. Once a query is made through either a comment, Post, or message; responded within a short time period. Customer satisfaction is ensured by taking feedback from customer reviews into account by the hotel management after the comments made are verified. All positive and negative reviews/comments are acknowledged in a constructive manner.

Table 4.6 Open and axial coding for maintaining engagement.

Selected Coding	Axial Coding	Open Coding
Maintaining engagement	Frequency of posting	Once in 2 to 3 days
		Almost daily. If not at least 3 to 4 time per week.
		Post every other day
		4 to 5 posts per week on each outlet
		Once a week post in Facebook
		If we have any activity, immediately post them.
		Posting daily.
		On festive seasons post every day
		Once in 2 or 3 days in Instagram
		Post same posted at Facebook to Instagram.
		Instagram, Facebook and Twitter linked together.
		Twitter linked to Instagram.
	Response rate	The response rate is about 74%. Most often within a day before the day end reply.
		Reply immediately for messages and comments.
		Available at any time to engage if needed for comments, reviews, and inbox messages.
		Messages are generally replied within an hour.
		Daily reply to messages
		Reply instantly
		Replying immediately.
Reply comments and messages immediately.		
Customer satisfaction	Customer feedback	On their own, only about 5% customers review the place
		Reviews on online travel agents
		Reviews on TripAdvisor, very descriptive hence useful
		Reviews on Facebook, Few words hence not very useful but ignites discussion
		Instagram posts and comments
	Acknowledgment	Facebook negative reviews - follow up personally for fact-finding
		Reply to all our TripAdvisor reviews.
		Respond to each review
	Follow through	Facing customer questions, complaints.
		In TripAdvisor get aggressive client reviews.
		In Facebook, get aggressive client comments/reviews sometimes just because that person didn't have a good day.
		Potential false reviews and comments.

Table 4.7 shows how “Audience reach” was derived through open coding and axial coding. Once the final category selection exercise (see Appendix D) was conducted the categories in Figure 4.5 were validated as necessary factors for audience reach. Hence, Audience reach is selected as one of the factors Sri Lankan boutique hotels need to consider during their SMM initiatives.

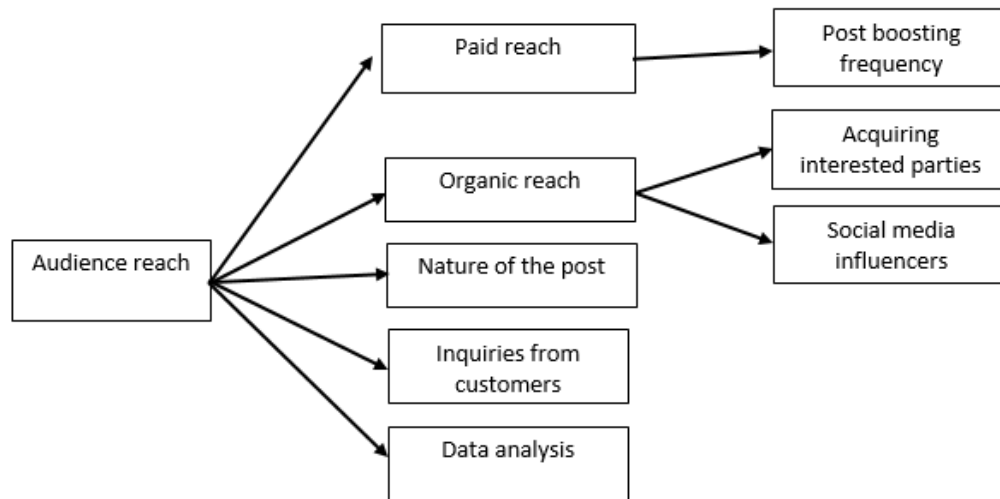


Figure 4.5: Audience reach factors to be considered.

Audience reach required to spread the word and gain new customers. Paid reach is necessary to reach potential customers that are not in the existing community. When doing paid reach need to be effective with the frequency of Post boosting to the same target audience. The hotels become careful not to be a nuisance to the audience. Organic reach is a very powerful tool that can be utilized in social networks. Acquiring interested parties with active social network users and having social media influential people spreading the word of the hotel throughout the social network is used to build strong organic reach. Nature of the post is made suitable to attract the audience to spend their time on the Post to read through. Every Post contains a sizeable image with less words. The image used is required to be attractive and effective. Usually, the Post have the facility to instantly book or inquire. If the post has a video, the time duration is restricted to between 30 – 60 seconds. Customer is given easy and quick inquiry access to further information. Data analysis is necessary to measure effectiveness.

Table 4.7 Open and axial coding for audience reach.

Selected Coding	Axial Coding	Open Coding
Paid Reach	Boosting frequency	Only during low seasons, we do social media ads/promotions in Facebook and Instagram which is not common.
		On average we post twice in a month on off/low seasons. Also, boost those posts.
		Promotions shouldn't be a nuisance to the customer. Targeting a particular customer segment once a month will be okay.
		The right post should go to the right audience at the right time.
		Comment section used by people to tag people
	Inquiries from the customer	Inquiries through calls and messages
		Event/function album always generate more inquiries
	Post nature	Explains everything with few words
		Very image based.
		Always carries a big image
		Carries contact details for more information
		Have to be very specific, otherwise could be difficult.
	Data analysis	Once we run a promotion, next day we compare internal reports with Facebook insight statistics to decide on promotion success.
		For every promotion, we get nearly 40 – 50 requests through the website & some convert into bookings.
		In promotions, you can specifically target your market from demographic factors.
		Comparatively the number of bookings have increased a lot for this year.
		Reviews and comments on everything was good.
		Measuring return on investment. Difficult to measure how much of return you got from a particular promotion
Assessing return on investment		
Organic reach	Acquiring interested parties	Likes and Follow numbers increasing
		Likes and Follow numbers increasing in all outlets
		Inbox messages have increased
		Comments are on the same level
		Acquired new customers through social media efforts
	Social media influencers	We try to utilize social media organic reach with influential followers.
		Quality followers and influencers desired
		Bring famous people to the property once in a while and cover the whole experience through social media along with other media coverage.
		Get International bloggers to come to the property
		Get people influential on social media to visit the property and promote us.
		Get influential Instagramers to visit the property.
		Higher quality bloggers and influencers traveling to the country.
		Posting of unique people visiting the hotel and experiencing.

	Data analysis	Cannot track the bookings initiating through social media
		Cannot assess the effectiveness
		No way to track the bookings initiating through social media
		Though ambiguous can match that against the payment to the outsourced company. In that way effective
		Qualitative engagement desired
		Conducting a survey through social media using a form without being time-consuming with a potential customer in an easy way.

Table 4.8 shows how “Timing” was derived through open coding and axial coding. Once the final category selection exercise (see Appendix D) was conducted the categories in Figure 4.6 were validated as suitable timing factors. Hence, Timing is selected as one of the factors Sri Lankan boutique hotels need to consider during their SMM initiatives.

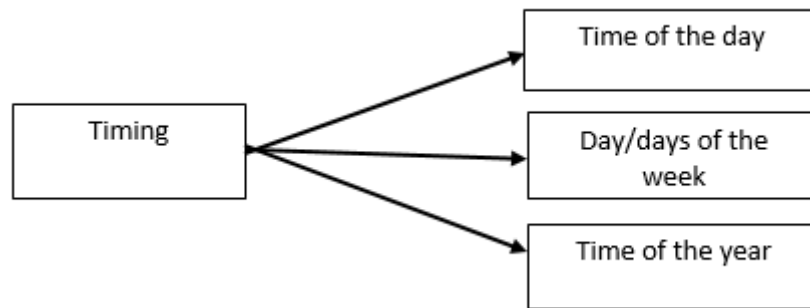


Figure 4.6: Timing factors to be considered.

Timing is a combination of a set of different factors such as best time of the year, best day(s) of the week, and best period of the day. Best days to post are Fridays and weekends and on those days’ hotels get high user interactions for the posts. On a typical day, the peak times to advertise is from 9:00 - 10:00 am, 12:00 - 2:00 pm and after 5:00 pm at which times tend to have higher user interactions on social media. These are the best times to publish a post and interact with the potential audience. However, depending on the purpose of the Post, posting time can change. For instance, if promoting lunch, have to go from 9:00 - 10:00 am. And for people who are coming for drinks after work, from 12:00 - 2:00 pm is the best time to post or promote.

Table 4.8 Open and axial coding for timing.

Selected Coding	Axial Coding	Open Coding
Timing	Time of the day	Always post before 10 am
		9:00 - 10:00 am or 11:00 am is good because when you get to work first thing you do is open Facebook even for at least 10 minutes.
		12:00 - 1:00 pm lunch break could be good but not very often
		8 pm could be a good time to post.
		Especially from 10 pm to midnight is a good time to post.
		Generally posting around 10 am is good.
		Certain time periods on the mornings and evenings where we have high traffic on Facebook and Instagram. So there are particular times we post in the mornings and sometimes evenings.
		In the morning people look at their Facebook news feed.
		Lunchtime and while traveling after work for working people.
		Peak times to advertise is from 9 – 10 am, 12 – 2 pm and after 5 pm.
		If promoting lunch have to go from 9 – 10 am. For people who are come for drinks after work; 12 – 2 pm best time.
	For kids, good times to post is from 5 – 6 am when getting ready to go to school.	
	Day/days of the week	Posting on Friday is the best. Carry it from Friday around 4 pm till Sunday and Monday.
Time of the year	If aiming for a season, have to start doing promotion ads at least 3 months back.	

Table 4.9 shows how “Resources” was derived through open coding and axial coding. Once the final category selection exercise (see Appendix D) was conducted the categories in Figure 4.7 were validated as suitable factors for resources. Hence, Resources is selected as one of the factors Sri Lankan boutique hotels need to consider during their SMM initiatives.

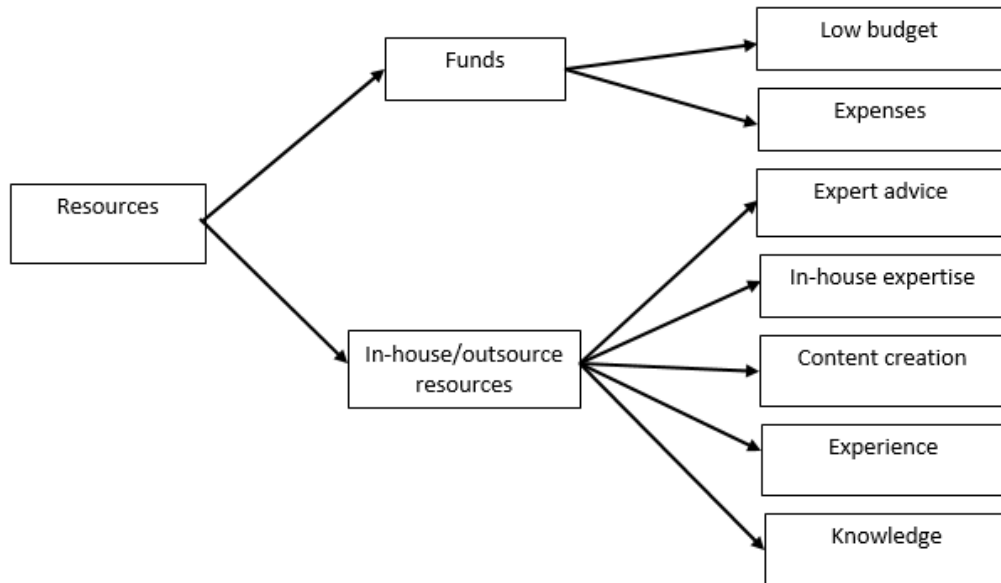


Figure 4.7: Resources factors to be considered.

The funds allocated for SMM are a considerably small amount compared to the total marketing budget. The cost to market on social media is much less than for marketing on mass media. However, the hotels still have to spend money on expert support on social media advertising and artwork creations.

For continuous operations in-house/outsource resources are required as well. Expert advice is required to know correct techniques to reach expected outcome in SMM. The hotels whose main marketing initiative is SMM, obtain expert advice on new trends, new technology changes, etc. Having in-house expertise is very beneficial when SMM is the main marketing initiative to the hotel. Content creation is diverse to increase the interest of audience such as scenery of the property, cuisine, signature styles of staff, how food is prepared, how drinks are prepared, customer experience, excursions available, activities available, etc. Personal experience obtained with time and the knowledge acquired through peer groups, articles and seeing others act has become useful to operate better with time.

Table 4.9 Open and axial coding for resources.

Selected Coding	Axial Coding	Open Coding
Resources	Low budget	Low budget compared other advertising
		Qualitative engagement desired
		A medium budget but we are doing great
		Very small budget.
		Low budget compared other advertising but enough
		Comparatively very low budget but high engagement.
		No budget allocated
	Expenses	Creation of ads.
		Platform costs
		Monthly fixed amount to the outsourced company
		Monthly fixed amount to the outsourced company for Facebook marketing
		Video production
	Technology advances	Getting familiar with technology advances.
		Have to be aware of new technology, procedures and things to increase the visibility online and to make people engaged with.
		The consequences of Platform updates.
		Sometimes the quality of photographs and videos (outsourced) are not up to the expectation.
	Ongoing operation	Process outsource
SMM for Facebook		
Joint collaboration		
Later outsourced for more concentration		
Video production		
Occasionally photoshoots		
Expert advice		From consultants
		From superiors
		From knowledgeable people
In-house expertise		In-house
		On the job learning
		Knowledgeable from the beginning
Content creation		In-house and outside support both
		In-house only
		Photos mostly in-house, occasionally professional photographers
		Content from guests
		SMM outsourced company do those
		Our pictures of guests experiencing
		Content shared by guests using hashtags
		We take photographs of guest activities.

	Experience	Learned on the job.
		Basic knowledge and experienced
		Instincts
	Knowledge	Follow SMM expert sites on www.
		Referred articles on www.
		Follow peer groups.
		Referred articles on www.
		Online communities
		Online articles

4.2.2 Deriving Moderating Factors

Table 4.10 shows how “Company policies” was derived through open coding and axial coding. Once the final category selection exercise (see Appendix D) was conducted the categories in Figure 4.8 were validated as supporting factors for company policies. Hence, company policies are selected as one of the factors Sri Lankan boutique hotels need to consider during their SMM initiatives.

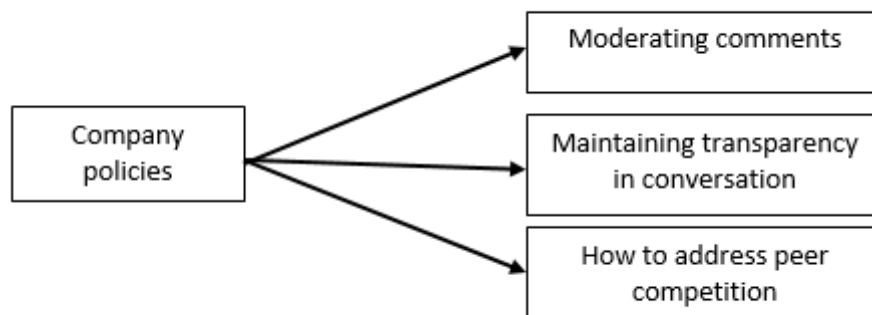


Figure 4.8: Company policy factors to be considered.

Hotels did not have company policies declared on conduct on SMM. The actions proposed to take during the interviews are based on the personal judgment which could vary from person to person. Hence, there will not be consistency in the hotel’s conduct on social media. Examples are how to moderate customer Posts or comments, how to carry out a meaningful conversation, to what level the hotel can be transparent to a customer and how the hotel shall address the peer competition in social media. Since most of the hotels have started their active social media presence within close to one year, most have not experienced much on these scenarios yet.

Table 4.10 Open and axial coding for company policies.

Selected Coding	Axial Coding	Open Coding
Company policies	Moderating comments	Not Experienced
		If any comment misguides my target customer base, will remove it.
		If those are visible, then remove. If it is an inbox message, then we ignore.
		We don't moderate comments.
		We remove not related comments.
	Transparency in conversation	Always provide required information when inquired
		We don't remove comments.
		Show true nature of the hotel. There is no bogus showcase.
		Unedited photos should be posted. Otherwise it will not convey the true nature.
		Make sure the same exact thing mentioned in promotion/picture is served as well.
		Everything is transparent
		All markets have one price.
		To all comments, we never reply on personal messages, reply there itself.
		Extremely transparent
	Peer competition on social media	Look at them for learning
		We listen to other different luxury hotels, other properties across the world.
		Check what competitors do, what their client's comment and what they wish. We take good out of that make ourselves better.
		Check other competitive hotels.
		See how people engage in their conversations. To develop from our side.
		Check through Instagram. To see what they are offering, trends. Try to remain competitive and fair.
		Look at them to get information, to improve ourselves.
Outsourced company thoroughly look at them from every angle		

Table 4.11 shows how “Constraints” was derived through open coding and axial coding. Once the final category selection exercise (see Appendix D) was conducted the only platform rules and regulations as in Figure 4.9 were validated as supporting factors for constraints. Hence, Platform rules and regulations are selected as one of the factors Sri Lankan boutique hotels need to consider during their SMM initiatives.

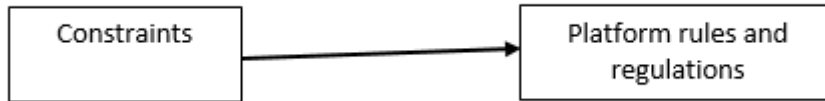


Figure 4.9: Constraints to be considered.

Hotels need to be aware of the platform-specific rules when marketing on social media. When promoting on Facebook and Instagram; hotels cannot promote regarding alcohol, shisha, tobacco and sometimes liquor. Also, posts cannot have a lot of text. Since nudity or any of that nature is not allowed post, other platform rules are favorable to the hotels.

Table 4.11 Open and axial coding for constraints.

Selected Coding	Axial Coding	Open Coding
Constraints	Platform rules and regulations	Favorable
		Not allowed to post nudity or any of that nature.
		Can't boost our alcohol and shisha through promotions, only post about them.
		Can't post tobacco and sometimes liquor.
		Can't post a lot of information about what promotion is about.
	Government/industry rules and regulations	No issue experienced
		No government laws yet related to social media.
		Following normal campaign rules and regulations. Ethical behavior.

4.3 Summary

We conducted both face to face and over the phone interviews of ten boutique hotels. Once the first interview was completed, keywords and key sentences were extracted as open coding, and the memos were written based on them. The constant comparative analysis was used for the second interview onwards, and it was required to edit, add, and remove a set of questions and change the sequence before going to the next interview. Comments from previous interviews were used to get more details from the respondents. Axial coding was generated based on the open coding collected from data gathered, and finally, the main categories (selected coding) were taken out after analyzing axial coding. To check and confirm these axial coding and final categories, a scale from zero to three was used. The author had to go through the gathered data, and

the boutique hotels were asked to identify whether they agreed with these categories. The categories, which got more than 50% as agreed and neutral, were identified as factors to be considered when conducting SMM initiative. There was a set of independent and moderate main categories authors could find out as factors to be considered and those are the target audience, platform for communication, mode of communication, maintaining engagement, audience reach, timing, resources, company policies and platform rules & regulations.

5. CONCLUSION AND FUTURE WORKS

This chapter presents the conclusion of the research, the limitations faced during the research and possible future work.

5.1 Conclusion

Boutique hotels are starting to rely on social media to conduct their marketing initiatives. It is important to understand the factors that contribute to the successful launch and conduct of such initiatives on social media also known as SMM. This study identifies those factors through a careful investigation of ten selected active social presences on social media by the Sri Lankan boutique hotels. We identified that the target audience, platform for communication, mode of communication, maintaining engagement, audience reach, timing and resources have a direct positive impact on the success of marketing initiatives on social media. Moreover, company policies and rules & regulations related to online platforms have a moderate impact. The study was conducted using a qualitative analysis while following Straussian grounded-theory.

Hotels need to identify their target audience, only then they can direct their SMM initiatives to correct demographics. We found that all boutique hotels cater to niche markets. Almost all boutique hotels facilitate luxury amenities. Hence the hotels look at customers who can afford their services. While some hotels look for families, some look for traveling young generation. In peak tourism seasons, hotels look for foreign tourists while on off-peak seasons they aim for local tourists.

Hotels need to choose their platforms for communication where their target audience is active. Facebook is a compulsory platform the hotels need to choose since it has all age groups in it. It is the platform with the largest active user base. Instagram is a compulsory platform the hotels need to have to capture young generation and travelers. It also a good platforms to showcase the uniqueness of the hotel. TripAdvisor is a compulsory platform the hotels need to have since it is considered as the major platform to review places. Twitter is good to have platform depending on the target audience since it has a unique crowd.

Images are the best mode of communication and video comes next due to bandwidth limitations. People tend to engage more with images and videos, and especially when they are in their native language. However, the best mode of communication depends on the content. Especially to showcase food images are best while to showcase how a cocktail is made videos are best.

Maintaining engagement is really important to build quality relationships. People expect regular updates. Hence, Posts should be posted regularly such as few times within a week. Once a query is made either through a comment, Post, or message; should response within a short time period. Maintaining customer satisfaction are very important. All reviews should be read and taken into account for the hotel management after the comments made are verified. All positive and negative reviews/comments should be acknowledged in a constructive manner.

Audience reach is very important for a hotel to spread the word and gain new customers. Paid reach is necessary to reach potential customers that are not in the existing community. When doing paid reach need to be very effective with the frequency of Post boosting to the same target audience. The hotel should be careful not to be a nuisance to the audience. Organic reach is a very powerful tool that can be utilized in social networks. Acquiring interested parties with active social network users and having social media influential people spreading the word of the hotel throughout the social network is essential to building strong organic reach. Nature of the post is very important to attract audience to spend their time on the Post to read through. Hence, every Post should have a sizeable image with less words. The image should be attractive and effective. The Post should have the facility to instantly book or inquire. If the post

has a video, the time duration should be very short such as between 30 – 60 seconds. The customer should be given easy and quick inquiry access to further information. Data analysis is very important to measure effectiveness.

Timing is one of the main factors hotels need to consider. Timing is a combination of a set of different factors such as best time of the year, best day(s) of the week, and best period of the day. Best days to post are Fridays and weekends and on those days' hotels get high user interactions for the posts. On a typical day, the peak times to advertise is from 9:00 – 10:00 am, 12:00 – 2:00 pm and after 5:00 pm at which times tend to have higher user interactions on social media. These are the best times to publish a post and interact with the potential audience. However, depending on the purpose of the Post, posting time changes. For instance, if promoting lunch have to go from 9:00 – 10:00 am. And for people who are coming for drinks after work, from 12:00 – 2:00 pm is the best time.

The fund resources allocated for SMM are a considerably small amount compared to the total marketing budget. The cost to market on social media is much less than for marketing on mass media. However, the hotels still have to spend money on expert support on social media advertising and artwork creations.

In-house/outsource resources are very important to have continuous success in SMM. Expert advice is required to know correct techniques to reach expected outcome in SMM. The hotels whose main marketing initiative is SMM, obtain expert advice on new trends, new technology changes, etc. Having in-house expertise is very beneficial when SMM is the main marketing initiative to the hotel. Content creation should be diverse to increase the interest of audience such as scenery of the property, cuisine, signature styles of staff, how food is prepared, how drinks are prepared, customer experience, excursions available, activities available, etc. Personal experience obtained with time and the knowledge acquired through peer groups, articles and seeing how others act are very valuable for improvement.

Having company policies declared on conduct on SMM is really important to be prepared for anything that could happen in future. Examples are how to moderate customer Posts or comments, how to carry out a meaningful conversation, to what level the hotel can be transparent to a customer and how the hotel shall address the peer

competition in social media. Since most of the hotels have started their active social media presence within close to one year, most have not experienced much on these scenarios yet. However, having what to do declared when an actual occasion rises will help the hotels to their actions in control and transparent.

Hotels need to be aware of the platform-specific rules when marketing on social media. When promoting on Facebook and Instagram; hotels cannot promote regarding alcohol, shisha, tobacco and sometimes liquor. Also, posts cannot have a lot of text. Since nudity or any of that nature is not allowed post, other platform rules are favorable to the hotels.

While these findings are specific to the ten social presences of respective boutique hotels analyzed, it is justifiable to generalize these findings to other SMM, to the whole hospitality industry, as the boutique hotels considered in the study were very diverse in what they are offering and where they are located geographically.

Further, it is observed throughout the research, to target locals, Facebook is the ideal social media platform while to target international crowd using both Facebook and Instagram social media platforms are used.

5.2 Research Limitations

Following limitations can be identified related to this research.

During the study, the author used the perspective of a visitor to the hotel Facebook page; to select the boutique hotels sample. In this approach, the author considered that all Posts posted by the Page administrator as performed by an individual. Hence, the author is unable to foresee whether the Page administrator is used by a single person or by several people.

The study only focuses on the Sri Lankan boutique hotel industry. Moreover, the study does not include all the boutique hotels since many hotels do not have an active social media presence and fulfill the required criteria. Furthermore, the study does not contain boutique hotels operating outside of Sri Lanka due to focus on the use of social media of local boutique hotels. Therefore, the same findings may not be directly applicable to other countries and business domains which are more or less mature.

Social media user based in Sri Lanka is highly skewed towards Facebook, and the user base or services are not as mature as some of the developed countries. Also, the study only targets the hotel's perspective, not from the customer perspective. Thus, there may be a disconnection between what hotels think as appropriate and need of their potential customers and what customers actually think and need.

During the study, it is observed most of the boutique hotels does not use social media as a primary marketing tool due to the difficulty in assessing the return on investment. Out of the ten boutique hotels participated in the study, only two hotels consider SMM as their main marketing initiative. From those two hotels, only one hotel can be considered somewhat matured in using SMM. Due to the difficulty of assessing return of investment, other hotels consider SMM as a secondary marketing tool though it requires comparatively a low budget. Therefore, most of the struggles are yet to be experienced by the Sri Lankan boutique hotels.

There were times where a part of SMM for the hotel is outsourced. In such cases, the conduct of outsourced company was unable to capture into the study.

5.3 Future work

A case study on a hotel whose main marketing strategy is SMM and also matured in using SMM will be able to show all little details that may have lost in this type of research. Such a study will be able to give more insight. Hence, this study could be further extended to a case study of one boutique hotel that is much matured in SMM.

During the study, a widely observed detail is that 90% of boutique hotels are unable to gauge the effectiveness of overall social media efforts. Another such observation is that many did not know a mechanism to assess return on investment they are getting from social media marketing. Hence, this study could be further extended to assess the return on investment on social media.

One of the observations during the study is Instagram is used for organic reach. Therefore, more research on organic reach on social media will be resourceful.

The study does not consider customer perspective. Hence, this study could be further extended to identify what customers actually think and need from the hotels SMM initiatives.

Even though there are many boutique hotels in Sri Lanka, only a few hotels use social media as a marketing tool although they have created accounts on social media. Therefore, future work could focus on what limits or prevents those hotels from being active on social media for marketing initiatives.

Furthermore, we could not find the rules or policies on social media marketing by the hotels. Hence, this research could be further extended to identify the social media marketing rules and policies that hotels should consider.

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Appendix A: Interview Questionnaire – Initial

1. Could you please explain a bit about your boutique hotel?
 - a. What unique aspects do you bring in, its amenities, customer base, etc.?
 - b. Who are your target/potential customers?
2. How do you spread the word or market your hotel?
 - a. What platforms do you use? What made you choose those platforms?
 - b. What were your key marketing strategies, prior to using social media?
 - c. Which marketing strategy seems to be the most effective?
3. What made you start using social media?
 - a. When did you start?
 - b. Did you start by yourself or got support from someone?
 - c. Do you rely on any expert support or advice to launch or run your social media engagement site and how?
 - d. Did you consider any resources/training on how to use social media marketing?
4. How do you engage with potential customers?
 - a. What type of content do you share?
 - b. Do you share your own content, or do you get someone to do those for you?
 - c. How often do you engage (e.g., post, reply, etc.)?
 - d. How do you listen to and address customers' needs and make sure they are satisfied with the experience?
 - e. Has your way of social media interaction or services provided by the hotel have changed based on such feedback/engagements?
5. Do you have any idea about number of followers, likes, comments, etc.?
 - a. What do you think about those numbers? Good, improving, bad?
 - b. How you assessed whether your engagement, time, and money spent on social media is effective?
 - c. Do you feel that you have acquired new customers through your social media efforts?

6. How effective are your social media campaigns compared to other modes of advertising?
 - a. What is your social media budget compared to your other advertising budget?
 - b. Where did you spend most of the money? (Platform costs, creation of ads, videos, etc.)
 - c. What works and what does not work? For e.g., Types of posts and when to posts.
 - d. Do you think having more resources, support, time, and money would strengthen your engagements?
7. What challenges do you face while using social media?
 - a. In terms of time, finances, technology, and customer related challenges?
 - b. Do you moderate posts, and if so what is your policy on moderating comments?
 - c. How would you ensure transparency to continue a meaningful conversation with your follows?
 - d. How do you address your competition on social media? Are you listening to customer conversations that aren't about your brand, per se?
 - e. Did platform rules and regulations effect of your initiatives, if so how?
 - f. Are there any government/industry rules and regulations that affect your engagements?
8. What else could be done to improve the effectiveness of your engagements?
9. Any other suggestions / best practices you'd like to share?

Thank you.

Appendix B: Interview Questionnaire – Modified

1. Could you please explain a bit about your boutique hotel?
 - a. What unique aspects do you bring in, its amenities, customer base, etc.?
 - b. Who are your target/potential customers?
2. How do you spread the word or market your hotel?
 - a. What platforms do you use? What made you choose those platforms?
 - b. What were your key marketing strategies, prior to using social media?
 - c. Which marketing strategy seems to be the most effective?
3. What made you start using social media?
 - a. When did you start?
 - b. Did you start by yourself or got support from someone?
 - c. Do you rely on any expert support or advice to launch or run your social media engagement site and how?
 - d. Did you consider any resources/training on how to use social media marketing?
4. How do you engage with potential customers?
 - a. What type of content do you share?
 - b. Do you share your own content, or do you get someone to do those for you?
 - c. How often do you engage (e.g., post, reply, etc.)?
 - d. When using multiple social media platforms, what is your approach?
 - e. How do you listen to and address customers' needs and make sure they are satisfied with the experience?
 - f. Has your way of social media interaction or services provided by the hotel have changed based on such feedback/engagements?
5. Do you have any idea about number of followers, likes, comments, etc.?
 - d. What do you think about those numbers? Good, improving, bad?
 - e. How you assessed whether your engagement, time, and money spent on social media is effective?

- f. Do you feel that you have acquired new customers through your social media efforts?
6. How effective are your social media campaigns compared to other modes of advertising?
- e. What is your social media budget compared to your other advertising budget?
 - f. Where did you spend most of the money? (Platform costs, creation of ads, videos, etc.)
 - g. What works and what does not work? For e.g., Types of posts and when to posts.
 - h. Do you think having more resources, support, time, and money would strengthen your engagements?
7. What Challenges do you face while using social media?
- g. In terms of time, finances, technology, and customer related challenges?
 - h. Do you moderate posts, and if so what is your policy on moderating comments?
 - i. How would you ensure transparency to continue a meaningful conversation with your follows?
 - j. How do you address your competition on social media? Are you listening to customer conversations that aren't about your brand, per se?
 - k. Did platform rules and regulations effect of your initiatives, if so how?
 - l. Are there any government/industry rules and regulations that affect your engagements?
8. What else could be done to improve the effectiveness of your engagements?
9. Any other suggestions / best practices you'd like to share?

Thank you.

Appendix C: Request Letter

Dear Sir/Madam,

We are conducting a research study to analyze the “self-driven social media marketing practices by the Sri Lankan boutique hotel sector”. This study plans to identify the important factors that boutique hotels should consider when conducting a marketing campaign via social media. This research study is conducted as part of the MBA in Information Technology (IT) postgraduate degree program conducted by the Department of Computer Science Engineering, University of Moratuwa.

As a member of the Sri Lankan boutique hotel community, we are inviting you to participate in this study by sharing your expertise in the form of an interview. The interview will take about 20 minutes and is informal. The list of sample questions attached herewith. In case there is no dedicated person for managing social media marketing, we highly appreciate if you could nominate a colleague who is responsible for social media marketing at your hotel.

This survey is stipulated confidential and anonymous. Your responses will not be identified with you personally or your hotel, and all findings will appear in aggregated form. You and your hotel will not be linked in any manner. Once the study is completed, we wish to share our findings with you.

Your participation in the research would be greatly appreciated. If you have any queries or wish to know more, please feel free to contact us using the details provided below.

We hope to have a useful and enlightening conversation. Thank you very much for your time and help in making this study possible.

Sincerely,

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Appendix D: Selection of Factors

0 - Not Applicable 1 – Disagree 2 – Neutral 3 – Agree

S1, S2, S3 ... S10 – 10 Boutique hotels interviewed

The equation used to calculate the percentage is as follows:

$$\text{Total Percentage} = \text{No of agreed or neutral organization} / \text{Total no of organizations} \times 100$$

The percentage value above 50 is only considered as factors for the study analysis.

Factors	S1	S2	S3	S4	S5	S6	S7	S8	S9	S10	%
Target audience											
Age groups	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	100
Interest groups	3	3	3	3	3	2	3	3	2	2	100
International market	3	3	3	1	2	2	3	3	3	3	90
Sri Lankan market	1	2	1	3	3	2	3	0	2	2	70
Platform for communication											
Facebook	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	100
Instagram	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	100
TripAdvisor	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	100
Twitter	3	1	2	1	2	2	3	1	3	2	70
Other social media platforms	1	1	1	3	2	1	3	1	3	2	50
In-house/outsource resources											
Process outsource	2	3	1	3	1	1	1	2	1	3	50
Expert advice	1	3	3	3	2	1	3	3	1	3	70
In-house expertise	3	2	3	1	3	2	3	2	3	1	80
Content creation	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	100
Experience	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	100
Knowledge	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	100
Mode of communication											
Images	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	100
Videos	2	2	2	2	2	3	3	2	3	2	100
Depends on the content	1	2	3	1	2	2	3	2	3	3	80
Maintaining engagement											
Frequency of posting	3	2	2	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	100
Response rate	3	3	3	2	2	3	3	3	3	3	100
Customer satisfaction											
Customer feedback	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	100
Acknowledgement	2	2	3	2	3	2	2	2	2	2	100
Follow through	2	1	2	3	1	3	3	3	1	1	50
Paid reach											
Boosting frequency	3	2	2	3	3	1	3	3	2	2	100
Inquiries from the customer	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	100
Post nature	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	100
Data analysis	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	100
Organic reach											
Acquiring interested parties	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	100
Social media influencers	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	100
Data analysis	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	100
Resources											
Low budget	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	100
Expenses	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	100

Factors	S1	S2	S3	S4	S5	S6	S7	S8	S9	S10	%
Technology advances	2	2	3	3	2	3	2	2	2	2	100
Company policies											
Moderating comments	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	100
Transparency in conversation	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	100
Peer competition on social media	3	3	3	3	2	3	3	3	3	3	100
Platform rules and regulations											
Effective	3	3	3	3	3	3	2	3	3	3	100
Government/industry rules and regulations											
No government rules and regulations	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	100
Lack of awareness	1	1	1	1	2	1	1	1	1	1	10
Timing											
Time of the day	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	100
Day/days of the week	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	100
Time of the year	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	100