E-marketing and Perceived Brand Image of Hotels in Ghana

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Abstract
This study examined the role of e-marketing in promoting perceived brand image of hotels in Ghana. The study used a quantitative approach. The correlational research design was employed. Using the random sampling technique, 420 hotel visitors were included in the study. Structured questionnaire was used for the data collection. Statistical tools of frequency, percentage, mean, standard deviation, and Pearson correlation coefficient were used to analyse the data collected. Results revealed that website contributed to building a positive brand image of hotels in Ghana. Furthermore, Facebook contributed to the construction of a positive brand image of hotels. Additionally, a positive relationship was found between the use of SMS and perceived brand image of hotels. Finally, it was revealed that the use of emails was positively associated with perceived brand image of hotels. It was recommended that management of hotels in Ghana enhance their websites and integrate Facebook features to make them easy for visitors to easily toggle between the main sites and Facebook pages.
Keywords: E-marketing, perceived brand image, hotels, Ghana

1. Introduction

Technology and its use have found their ways into the hospitality industry, as hospitality service providers rely heavily on them to promote their brand images (Machmud & Sin, 2019). According to Mullatahiri and Ukaj (2019) have argued that business organisations, such as hotels, can employ e-marking tools to help enhance their perceived brand images. Consequently, several studies have been carried out to investigate the association between e-marketing and perceived brand image of business firms (Al Showa & Ghadeer, 2020; Štefko et al., 2014). Machmud and Sin (2019) reported that firms in Eastern Indonesia have been able to promote their brand images through e-marketing strategies, such as the use of well-designed websites. Štefko et al. (2014) also indicated a relationship between the use of e-marketing tools and images of business firms. Mullatahiri and Ukaj (2019) found e-marketing to have improved brand image of business firms. Al Showa and Ghadeer (2020) further revealed the use of basic e-marketing elements to have promoted brand recognition of business organisations. On the flipside, some prior studies documented a negative (Ahmed, Shaukat, Nawaz, Ahmed & Usman, 2011) or no (Aydin & Özer, 2005; Erdoğmuş & Cicek, 2012) link between e-marketing tools and brand image.

It could be realised from the above that the relationship between e-marketing and perceived brand image of business firms has been mixed – as some have reported a negative relationship, others have shown a positive relationship. This could be attributed to the influence of the different research contexts; implying that this relationship should be extensively explored across other contexts. For instance, most of the extant empirical studies focused on more industrialised economies, with little attention given to developing economies, such as Ghana, despite the indispensability of the use of e-marketing tools in this 21st century (El Khazri, 2022). In Ghana, whilst some hotels use e-marketing tools, such as emails, social media platforms and websites, to promote their brand images, as well as their services, others do not own any e-platforms to promote their services (Anaman & Dacosta, 2017). Overall, this has adversely influenced the customer base and revenue generation of these hotels (El Khazri, 2022; Saeed, Arous & Ahmed, 2018).

Taking the foregoing into account, it is imperative to investigate the role of website, as an e-marketing tool, in promoting perceived brand image of hotels in Ghana; determine the contribution of Facebook, as an e-marketing tool, to improving the perceived brand image of hotels in Ghana; and analyse the relationship between short message service (SMS), emails, as e-marketing tools, and perceived brand image of hotels in Ghana. These are predicated on the assertions of the Hoffman and Novak's conceptual model which is based on the flow in interactive computer-mediated environments and online customer experience (Hoffman & Novak, 1996; Novak, Hoffman & Yung, 2000). This model has been applied in studies where the focus was to assess emails and SMS as a means to engage present and prospective clients of business firms (Kapoor & Kapoor, 2021; Labanauskaitė, Fiore & Stašys, 2020; Štefko et al., 2015). Hoffman and Novak's model has also anchored prior studies which sought examine how brand image of a firm could be enhanced by establishing, controlling and managing websites, as well as ensuring presence on media such as Facebook, use of emails and SMS to engage clients (Bala & Verma, 2018; Ghadeer, 2017).

2. Materials and Methods

This study was quantitative, and employed a correlational research design, as it sought to determine the association between the use of e-marketing tools and perceived brand image (Kapoor & Kapoor, 2021; Labanauskaitė, Fiore & Stašys, 2020). The target population was the visitors of 100 registered hotels selected randomly across Ghana. In total, 843 visitors were found lodging in these hotels at the time the researcher contacted these hotels. Ultimately, 420 visitors agreed and made up the sample for the study. Questionnaires were used for the data collection. The questionnaire was divided into four (4) sections – A to D. The sections were organised, respectively, under "Demographic Information", "Role of website in promoting hotel brand image", "Contribution of Facebook to hotel brand image", and "SMS, emails, and perceived brand image".

More specifically, Section A contained two demographic items. Section B contained five items adapted from the instruments used by several prior researchers to collect data for studies which, among other things, assessed websites as tools of e-marketing (Švandová, 2013; Fransen &Van Rompay, 2011; Štefkoa, Fedorko & Bačík, 2015). Section C was made up of eight items adapted from Švandová (2013), Fransen and Van Rompay (2011) and Štefkoa et al. (2015). For SMS, emails, and brand image – Section D – there were five items on SMS, eight items on emails, and four items on perceived brand image. All items in Section D were adapted from Shanka, Quintal and Taylor (2006), Švandová (2013), and Fransen and Van Rompay (2011). All items contained in Sections B through D were anchored on a five-point Likert-type scale varying from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree).

Regarding data collection, the managers of the hotels involved in the study were informed about the main purpose of the study. The managers then prompted the visitors about the survey which 420 in total agreed to partake. The survey instruments were then made available to the managers of the hotels, who in turn engaged their receptionists to help with the process. It should be pointed out that the receptionists had been taken through the instruments and how to administer them. Subsequently, the receptionists reached out to the visitors with the instruments. Those who were interested filled the instruments. The receptionists then collated the completed instruments and submitted them to their managers. The managers contacted the researcher to come for the completed instruments. The entire process lasted one month – from 13th December, 2022 to 12 January, 2023.

All the 420 instruments were found suitable for analysis. For analysis of the data, mean, standard deviation, and the Pearson correlation coefficient were used. A mean score of (>3.0) was defined as an overall agreement to a scale item, whilst a mean score of (<3.0) indicated overall disagreement to an item. A correlation coefficient of +1 represents a perfect positive correlation whilst a value of -1 denotes a perfect negative correlation, and zero (0) indicates no association between SMS, emails, and perceived brand image of hotels.

3. Results and Discussion

This section presents the results obtained from the data analysis, as well as their discussions. These have been organised specifically under "The role of website in promoting perceived brand image of hotels", "Contribution of Facebook to perceived brand image of hotels", "Relationship between SMS and perceived brand image", and "Relationship between emails and perceived brand image". It should, however, be stated that, demographically, more males (n = 220) than females (n = 200) took part in the study. Also, majority were 40 years or above (n = 357), whilst only 48 were within the age bracket 26 – 39 years, and the remaining being less than 26 years old (n = 15).

3.1 The Role of Website in Promoting Perceived Brand Image of Hotels

From the results in Table 1, it could be seen that, generally, the website positively contributes to the perceived brand image of hotels in Ghana. Specifically, the design of websites was found to contribute to positive image construction of hotels (Mean = 3.90±0.90SD). Clarity of the website has also been reported to have helped in building the brand image of hotels (Mean = 4.05±0.97SD). Similarly, the result revealed that content of the website about services offered by the hotels was beneficial to building positive brand image of hotels (Mean = 4.04±0.87SD). Content information on life at the hotels was also shown to have contributed positively to the brand image of hotels (Mean = 4.23±0.87SD). Social element inclusion on hotels' websites was revealed to have promoted the brand image of hotels (Mean = 4.19±0.90SD).

Table 1. Role of website in perceived brand image promotion

Statements	Mean	SD
The design of the hotel's website contributes to positive image construction.	3.90	.90
Clarity of the website helps in building positive brand image for the hotel.	4.05	.87
The website content about service information is useful to promoting positive brand image.	4.04	.97
The web content on life at the hotel promotes positive brand image.	4.23	.87
Inclusion of social elements on the hotel's website positively promotes its brand image.	4.19	.90

This finding was simply in line with the fact that technology has widely been accepted, and making good use of it has been associated with positive outcomes (Machmud et al., 2019). The use of website, which falls

within the remits of advanced technology, to promote activities and services of hotels should be expected to draw the attention of current and prospective customers or visitors to the website of the hotels. This is because visitors find it time- and cost-saving to visit the website of a hotel, for all their information needs, from the comfort of their homes without having to visit the hotels for such information. Consequently, these web visitors develop likeness for the website and the respective hotels; thus, share the news to others to visit the website for their information needs. Ultimately, the perceived brand image of the hotels is improved as recognition is gained through the engaging website.

This finding corroborates the findings of Štefko et al. (2014), Mullatahiri and Ukaj (2019) and Machmud et al. (2019). Štefko et al. (2014) intimated that website is important in business promotion of organisations. Similarly, Mullatahiri and Ukaj (2019) were of the view that well-designed website with informative content is crucial to brand enhancement of firms. Moreover, Machmud et al. (2019) stated that people give more recognition to organisations with live websites than those without websites. From these, it could be said that for an institution to improve its brand image and gain recognition in this 21st century, there is the need for online engagements with existing and potential clients, and one of the ways through which this can be done is having well-designed website platform in place. Considering these, it is evident that website is a crucial e-marketing tool for hotels in Ghana. Therefore, for the hotels to enhance their brand image among the general public, there is the need to improve their websites, and as well enhance the design and content of these websites.

3.2 Contribution of Facebook to Perceived Brand Image of Hotels

The results in Table 2 showed that, overall, Facebook contributes to the construction of positive brand image of hotels. According to majority of the respondents, Facebook helps build positive brand image of hotels (Mean = 4.02 ± 1.09SD). Facebook platforms have also been found to be very important in promoting hotels' brand image (Mean = 4.04 ± 1.05SD). Discussion forums on Facebook were also deemed helpful in constructing good brand image of hotels (Mean = 4.09 ± 0.97SD). Further, the visitor respondents claimed that the presence of Facebook ensures that questions are asked by prospective visitors, and answers are provided accordingly, and all these go a long way to promote the brand image of hotels (Mean = 3.83 ± 1.01SD). Furthermore, newsletters from Facebook were deemed to be effectual in promoting positive brand image of hotels in Ghana (Mean = 3.87 ± 1.09SD). Similarly, Facebook publications on hotels would be relevant to the promotion of the brand image of hotels (Mean = 4.08 ± 0.94SD). Facebook has live chat and this is believed to be relevant to the construction of positive brand image of hotels (Mean = 3.77 ± 1.11SD). Again, the Facebook application in general was deemed as an indispensable marketing tool which could help promote brand image of hotels (Mean = 3.78 ± 1.06SD).

Table 2. Contribution of Facebook to brand image

Statements	Mean	SD
Facebook helps build positive brand image of hotels.	4.02	1.09
Facebook platforms are very important in promoting the hotels' brand image.	4.04	1.05
Discussion forums on Facebook are helpful in constructing good brand image of hotels.	4.09	.97
The hotel's Facebook presence will ensure Question and Answers thus promoting positive brand image of the hotel.	3.83	1.01
Newsletters from Facebook can be effective in promoting positive image of the hotel.	3.87	1.09
Publications on Facebook are relevant in the promotion of positive brand image of the hotel.	4.08	.94
Facebook live chat is relevant to the hotel's brand image construction.	3.77	1.11
The Facebook application in general is an indispensable marketing tool used in promoting the brand images.	3.78	1.06

Facebook is one of the widely used social platforms with more than two billion users (Statista, 2022). Ghanaian hotels using this platform would be able to reach out to the masses, and hence enhance their brand image. Individuals within and outside Ghana would get to know about these hotels, and possibly seek to patronise them. This finding is in line with the finding of Al Showa and Ghadeer (2020) who also found that Facebook has become an indispensable tool in business promotion. In like manner, Štefko et al. (2014) posited that Facebook is among the relevant media platforms when it comes to enterprise image promotion. Machmud et al. (2019) also, among other things, revealed that for a business to promote its brand image in this current dispensation, the use of Facebook cannot be overemphasised.

3.3 Relationship between SMS and Perceived Brand Image

Overall, the results displayed in Table 3 showed a positive and statistically significant relationship between the use of SMS and perceived brand image of hotels ($r = 0.31$, $p < 0.01$). This result indicates that the use of SMS by hotels in Ghana to engage their visitors contributes to the promotion of the brand image of the hotels. This is in line with the finding of Mullatahiri and Ukaj (2019) who found that the use of text messages by business firms to reach out to customers enhances the brand image of the firms. A similar finding was documented by Schüller

and Chalupský (2012) who revealed that short message service gives enterprises recognition. Specifically, the use of SMS showed significant positive relationship with all the indicators of perceived brand image, except the fact of visitors speaking well of the hotel which appeared not to have any significant correlation with hotels' use of SMS to engage their visitors (r = 0.11, p > 0.05). The result revealed that the more the hotels in Ghana use SMS, the more the visitors would have positive perception about a hotel's brand image (r = 0.30, p < 0.01). Similarly, frequency of visits appeared to correlate directly with hotel's ability to use SMS to engage visitors (r = 0.28, p < 0.01). The use of SMS was also found to give the hotels high recognition (r = 0.27, p < 0.01).

Table 3. SMS and perceived brand image

Variables	SMS	Positive perception about hotel's brand image	Visited because of hotel's brand image	Speaking well of the hotel	Recognition	Perceived brand image
SMS	1.00					
Positive perception about hotel's brand image	.30**	1.00				
Visited because of hotel's brand image	.28**	.23**	1.00			
Speaking well of the hotel	.11	.25**	.30**	1.00		
Recognition	.27**	.44**	.12	.31**	1.00	
Perceived brand image	.31**	.63**	.76**	.63**	.48**	1.00

*** = correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).*

From the results, it could be seen that for hotels in Ghana to enhance their brand image, there is the need to improve how they engage with their visitors and other stakeholders by way of using SMS. This could be explained within the Hoffman and Novak's model which links the use of technological media to enhanced performance of organisations. Enhanced performance could be in several forms such as striving to improve the image or brand of an entity, among others (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). Thus, the Hoffman and Novak's model could be said to have been upheld by the present finding.

3.4 Relationship between Emails and Perceived Brand Image

From the results in Table 4, the general use of emails as a correspondence tool by hotels showed a positive and statistically significant relationship with perceived brand image of hotels (r = 0.64, p < 0.01). This result indicated that the use of emails by the hotels in Ghana to engage their visitors promotes brand image of the hotels. This is in line with the finding of Machmud et al. (2019) who found that the use of online text messaging tools by organisations to reach out to clients boosts people's perception about the brand image of the organisations. Also, Mullatahiri and Ukaj (2019) documented that online messaging tools, such as emails, help organisations to position themselves in the memory of their clients, and this eventually gives the organisation the needed recognition. More specifically, the use of emails by hotels showed significant positive relationship with all the indicators of perceived brand image. The use of emails creates positive perception about hotels' brand image (r = 0.72, p < 0.01). The use of emails by hotels was also revealed to increase rate of visits to the hotels (r = 0.29, p < 0.01). Again, the use of emails to engage visitors was found to give the hotels high recognition among visitors (r = 0.54, p < 0.01), and as well get visitors speak well of the hotels (r = 0.45, p < 0.01).

Table 4. Emails and perceived brand image

Variables	Emails	Positive perception about hotel's brand image	Visited because of hotel's brand image	Speaking well of the hotel	Recognition	Brand Image
Emails	1.00					
Positive perception about hotel's brand image	.72**	1.00				
Visited because of hotel's brand image	.29**	.23**	1.00			
Speaking well of the hotel	.45**	.25**	.30**	1.000		
Recognition	.540*	.44**	.12	.31**	1.00	
Perceived brand image	.64**	.63**	.76**	.63**	.48**	1.00

*** = Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).*

From the results, it could be realised that for hotels in Ghana to enhance how visitors perceive their brand image, there is the need for them to improve how they engage their visitors and other stakeholders through emails. This could be explained within the Hoffman and Novak's model which links the use of technological media to performance of organisations. According to Schüller and Chalupský (2012), improved performance revolves around creation of good brand image, among others. Taking this into consideration, the Hoffman and Novak's model could be said to have been supported by this finding.

5. Conclusions and Recommendations

The study sought to find out how e-marketing tools relate with perceived brand image of hotels in Ghana. It was found that website contributes to building a positive brand image of the hotels. It was also revealed that Facebook contributes to the construction of positive brand image of hotels in Ghana. Furthermore, the use of SMS and emails were positively associated with perceived brand image of hotels in Ghana. These imply that e-marketing tools are needed to enhance brand image of hotels, as well as to boost their recognition. Thus, website, Facebook, use of emails and SMS are drivers of brand image of hotels. Therefore, well-designed websites with informative and educative contents, as well as engaging Facebook, emails and SMS in correspondences with visitors would help hotels to have their brand images enhanced and promoted.

Based on the findings and conclusions drawn, management of hotels in Ghana should enhance their website and integrate Facebook features to make it easy for the website visitors to easily toggle between the main site and Facebook. Management should also place all visitor-related official information on the website as this would encourage visitors to frequent the website, hence popularising the brand image of the hotel. It is further recommended for future researchers to employ the Hoffman and Novak's model in the study of the relationship between e-marketing issues and branding or performance of business firms, as it was found to be in alignment with the present findings. It should however be pointed out that further studies are required to test the cause-effect relationship between e-marketing and perceived brand image, since the present study could not conclude statistically that the use of e-marketing causes improved brand image.

Institutional Review Board Statement: Because of the nature of the study, and in the absence of any involvement of medication, no formal approval of the Institutional Review Board of the local Ethics Committee was required. Nevertheless, all subjects were informed about the study and participation was fully on a voluntary basis. Participants were assured of confidentiality and anonymity of the information associated with the survey. The study was conducted according to the guidelines of the Declaration of Helsinki.

Informed Consent Statement: Informed consent was obtained from all subjects involved in the study.

Conflicts of Interest: The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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