

**UNIVERSITY OF KWAZULU - NATAL**

**The Role of Social Media in Influencing Tourist Consumer Behaviour within the  
Holiday Travel Process**

**By**

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**A dissertation submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of  
Master of Business Administration**

**Graduate School of Business & Leadership  
College of Law and Management Studies**


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**2018**



**College of Law and Management Studies**

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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I wish to express my sincere appreciation and gratitude to the following individuals, without whose assistance, this study would not have been possible:

- My supervisor Prof. Cecile Gerwel Proches, for believing in my capabilities and providing the guidance, support and the enthusiasm for my research.
- I would also like to mention the 12 participants that took part in the interview process. They gave up their time on holiday to provide me with their experiences and views.
- To the management and staff of N'taba River Lodge in facilitating the research process by allowing me the opportunity to conduct interviews with their guests.
- To the Graduate School of Business and Leadership, for allowing me the opportunity to attend the MBA programme and conduct this research.
- To all my lecturers in the MBA programme, your guidance, intellect and insights have provided me with an abundance of knowledge.
- Vishal Poona and Perusha Govender, a friendship that stood the test of MBA and will endure long into the future.
- To my cousin Poovendran "No.7" Moodley, your consistent support, guidance and mentorship is most appreciated.
- To Coco, a loving and most loyal study partner. Always by my side during all my long study hours.
- To my parents for giving me the resources and time to follow my dreams.
- To god for providing me the peace of mind and focus throughout my studies.
- A special mention to my mother, who served as the beacon of light amongst the darkness. The pillar of strength that I leaned on. The motivator, the inspiration, the unwavering spirit of determination, these words don't do justice to the spirit that essentially is you. It is your sense of spirit born of the enlightenment that has made me what I am. The ability to place your hands on the arc of history and bend it to your will and your faith in reason and primacy of right, has provided me the cause for which I aspire to. Your belief in my abilities propelled me to start this journey. Your strength of mind served me well during the journey. Your conviction guided me to the end of this journey. Mum, to you all I can say is thank you.

## **ABSTRACT**

Social media impacts on how people articulate and communicate ideas, and the manner whereby they participate with commodities, products, and institutions or establishments. Numerous studies have revealed the role and influence of social media on consumer behavior during the travel process that is before, during, and after the trip. Other studies engage in a specific type of social method, a specific application or on a particular stage of the decision-making process. Although such micro approaches have advantages, the overall illustration of the ways that consumers use social media and their influence, during all phases of the travel process and during all stages of the decision-making process continues to be ambiguous. In order to address this gap, this study aimed to investigate the role of social media on consumer behaviour within the holiday travel process. To achieve this aim, qualitative research employing semi-structured interviews were conducted through purposive sampling of twelve active social media users. It was revealed that social media are used during all stages of the travel process, and during all stages of holiday related decision-making processes. The finding of this research has shown simply that consumers' social media use before and during travel is largely associated with gaining data regarding the destination choice, while the usage of social media after the trip embraced activities associated with sharing and uploading photos and experiences and by posting textual reviews, in addition to recommending the trip to others. Based on this, it is proposed by this study that consumers' travel decision-making process requires the understanding that each stage of the decision-making process is not independent; they are connected and influence each other, this understanding can enable tourism promoters such as N'taba River Lodge to provide pertinent marketing stimuli to consumers at various stages of their travels.

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# **CHAPTER 1: RESEARCH OVERVIEW**

## **1.1 Introduction**

Prior to the current phenomena that is social media, consumers had a limited availability of resources that allowed them to gather information on products and services, and accommodation was primarily purchased through information obtained from brochures or travel agents (Hu and Wei, 2013). In recent years social media has been able to replace such traditional sources of information, due to the availability of content generated by current social media customers.

Travellers can now use social media to make decisions and plan their holidays with reference to vast amounts of information readily available on social media platforms. Within the framework of tourism, purchasers implement social media for an immense range of circumstances such as disclosing experiences that are pertinent to their travel, debating and exchanging ideas with other travellers, associating with individuals from diverse backgrounds and obtaining services and products related to their travels (Munar and Jacobsen, 2014; Zeng and Gerritsen, 2014).

Propagation of data by means of communication technology has played a large role in affecting actions of consumers in travel; the internet has the ability to transform how tourists make choices between alternative holidays (Gohil, 2015). The decision-making process of tourists has been fundamentally changed through the adoption of social media by tourists; potential tourists are influenced by the exposure of travel related content posted by other users. This exposure serves as the motivation that guides and shapes their decision (Fotis, 2015).

However, how and why social media influences a traveller's decision making within the travel process, remains relatively not well understood. Hence, this research aimed to explore how social media influences tourist decision making process, contributing to the understanding of the role that social media plays in influencing consumer behaviour within that holiday travel process.

This chapter presents the research overview, outlining the motivation and focus of the study. The research problem is brought to light through the problem statement. The study aims and

objectives are outlined. The chapter then briefly describes the methodology that was used in the study. The chapter concludes through a synopsis of each chapter in the study.

## **1.2 Background**

N'taba River Lodge, situated in what is commonly known as the Wild Coast, in the Eastern Cape, was the chosen and appropriate site for this study, as the site provided the scope and issues pertinent to this study (N'taba River Lodge, 2018). The establishment provided the context that inspired the study because its location is a mixture of local African hospitality set within the rich diversity of our rugged African landscape and untouched surroundings, on the one hand, and a poor rural town on the other (N'taba River lodge, 2018). Since this research focuses on the role that social media plays in influencing consumer behavior, the study investigates how the appeal of the Lodge can be promoted by further exposure on social media.

Local Tour operators and individual travelers, have planned tour routes passing from and to the Lodge starting their tours in Johannesburg and ending in Cape Town, making Port St Johns an ideal stop-over in terms of distance between the various destinations.

The Lodge has a presence on social media sites such as Bookings.Com, Travel ground, Safari Now, Airbnb and Agoda, to lure visitors to the Lodge. However, the management have not grasped the full extent to which social media can be utilized to appeal to their customers, reaching a wider target group and thereby promoting their business.

Management needs to capitalize on the advent of sites such as Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, and TripAdvisor, which have revolutionized the way travelers can participate in and connect with each other. This indicates that marketing a business through social media is an important business strategy and should therefore be included in the online marketing efforts of tourism businesses (Cusick, 2013).

It is possible for travelers to communicate with tourism operators and fellow tourists, providing first-hand information about their travel experience. Social media has given the tourism industry innovative means to facilitate valuable dialogue, whereby consumers can create their own content that influences the image and reputation of businesses and is easily available to potential tourists (Kim, Xiang and Fesenmaier, 2015).

### **1.3 Motivation and focus of study**

Due to the relatively intangible nature of tourism products and difficulty in evaluating them prior to purchase, researchers have argued that for tourists to reduce the risks associated with purchasing tourism products, travellers are engaged in information search from a number of sources (Fotis, 2015).

There is a satisfactory amount of travel- related social media studies previously conducted, however, such studies focus on specific social media applications (Cox 2009; Fotis, Buhalis, Rossides, 2012; Jacobson and Munar, 2012; Tan, Liu, and Gursoy, 2018). As such, these studies take a micro approach to specific areas of social media namely: specific types of social media, a specific part of the decision-making process of tourists or specific motivators that induce a purchase.

In light of the presence of such focused studies, this study took a more inclusive approach by exploring the influence that social media has on the tourist's consumer behaviour in the course of their travel process. This in turn, provided a comprehensive view, which provided a holistic insight into social media practice and its influences.

Establishments such as N'taba River Lodge can gain insights from such an inclusive approach, by better understanding how travellers go about receiving information as part of their decision making, how they respond to travel stimuli as well as the level of influence that such sources have on them. Such an understanding will provide tourism marketers and establishments such as N'taba River lodge with a guideline for evoking action from travellers through the purchase of their travel related products during the various stages of the traveller's holiday.

### **1.4 Problem statement**

Port St John, in the Eastern Cape, is a largely unknown destination to visit in South Africa. Typically, when travellers visit N'taba River Lodge, in Port St Johns, they are travelling en-route between the bigger metropolitan cities. Customers have realized during their visit, that they would have missed out on this beautiful town, had they not stopped overnight (N'taba River Lodge, 2018).

N'taba River Lodge and many other tourism marketers alike, fail to acknowledge the proliferation of social media and that actively targeting social media platforms, can evoke

the purchase of tourism products by tourist through the various stages of the holiday process. N'taba River lodge is not sufficiently visible on the various social media sites: there is no presence on Twitter or Instagram and Lodge pictures and information is posted erratically on Facebook. Hence, exposure of the Lodge to tourist is minimal and suggestions, or comments promoting this destination, is absent. This has been highlighted by Prayag, Hosany, Muskat and Del Chiappa (2017), stating that the utilization of social media marketing is in its infancy.

Studies on social media and its relationship with tourism has been the subject of researchers (Han, Kim and Kiatkawsin, 2017). Such studies have paid attention to access of information, the variety of communicative tools being used, the motivation and decision to travel, how social media is used during a holiday and the participation with online network sites once the holiday ends. However, the contribution of social media affecting the entire process of travelling has still not been adequately examined.

Hence, there is insufficient evidence provided to link the various phases of holiday travel and the significant contribution that social media offers to the tourism industry. Consequently, there is a gap in the literature which focusses on social media and its attention on specific travel phases. Thus, the need arose in exploring the influential nature of social media on the travel decisions of tourists. Vitally important is the ability to gauge customer's motives and understanding their information requirements.

### **1.5 Aim and objectives**

The purpose of the study was to explore the influential role of social media on the travel process of tourists. In view of this the study aim was to focus attention on the influential role of social media on tourist's consumer behaviour.

In respect to this aim the objectives of the study were as follows:

- To explore the influence of social media on the holiday travel process.
- To determine how social media is used by tourists during the holiday travel process.
- To provide an understanding of the potential implications of social media for tourism marketers.

The following research questions were formulated to achieve the objectives:

- How does social media influence the holiday travel process?
- How is social media used by tourists during the holiday travel process?
- What are the implications of social media for travel-related tourist marketing?

## **1.6 Methodology**

This study adopted a qualitative approach in which semi structured interviews were conducted with travellers that are active users of social media. Participants were interviewed face to face in order to allow for the uninterrupted flow of communication between the participants and the researcher. The interviews were conducted with 12 participants after ethical clearance, (Appendix 4) - was received from the UKZN Research Office. The selection of interviews as the data collection instrument, was influenced by the nature of the study and in terms of the information that was deemed necessary. A tape recorder was used for all interviews, with the consent of participants after which interviews were transcribed. The researcher employed thematic analysis in analysing all transcribed data pertaining to the interviews and subsequently broken down into themes.

## **1.7 Limitations**

While the current study has been able to provide some interesting findings, the study did have its limitations. One such limitation was regarding the availability of respondents as all respondents were on holiday when interviewed. Their participation in interviews would have potentially come in the way of their tourist activities, careful consideration had to be paid to this and was mitigated by fitting interviews in periods of the day that suited respondent's itinerary.

Through the application of a qualitative approach which was based on semi structured face to face interviews, a sample size that is relatively small was used in comparison to that of a quantitative study. This reduces the level of generalisability of findings to all tourism consumers.

## **1.8 Structure of the research**

### **Chapter one: Research overview**

This chapter provided an overview of the research topic, the study's aim and research objectives and a broad outline of the research methodology and assumptions underpinning the study.

### **Chapter two: An overview of the Tourism Industry and the tourist**

An overview of the tourism industry, its economic impact and traveller motivation is made in this chapter.

### **Chapter three: Social media literature review**

This chapter provided an understanding of social media. The chapter started with a short introduction of the internet and Web 2.0., it then moved on to critically addressing issues surrounding social media with regards to terminology, definition and taxonomy. The chapter continued by looking at each type of social media as categorised by this study and reflected on previous studies that have investigated the impact of various types of social media on the travel related behaviour of consumers. In concluding, the chapter identified the gap in literature, which was a result of a micro approach to most studies. Therefore, in this chapter we identified the need for a comprehensive study that portrayed a picture of the general landscape.

### **Chapter four: Consumer behaviour literature review**

Chapter Three pursued the perspective through which consumer behaviour was explored in relation to this study. The chapter began with an introduction to consumer behaviour and attempted to find a definition for this study through the critical review of existing literature on the topic. A review of the factors that affected consumer behaviour was deemed necessary in order to understand how these factors have been influenced through the use of social media. Proceeding from this, the chapter then reviewed consumer behaviour models and how the constructs of these models could potentially be affected by social media within the tourism context.

## **Chapter five: Research methodology**

A thorough discussion on the methodology is made in this chapter. Justification for the decisions taken, as well as an in-depth review of the research process is made. A discussion on the research paradigms and an understanding of the research philosophy was considered essential in conducting this study. The decision to adopt a qualitative approach was substantiated, based on the nature of this study.

## **Chapter six: Findings and discussion**

The presentation of the findings from the interviews conducted take place in this chapter and are discussed in relation to literature reviewed.

## **Chapter seven: Conclusion and recommendations**

This chapter discusses the key findings in relation to the objectives of the study and provided recommendations based on these findings. Areas for future studies are recommended in this final chapter.

### **1.9 Conclusion**

Chapter one introduced the study through a discussion of the research problem. In this chapter the studies aims and objectives as well as the motivation and focus for the study was discussed. The chapter then focused its discussion on the research methodology adopted for the study and highlighted the limitation it encountered while conducting this research. The chapter concluded with a summary of the structure of the thesis by giving a synopsis of each chapter. Following on from this, the next chapter provides an overview of the tourism industry, the value of tourism to the South African economy and how tourists are motivated.

## **CHAPTER TWO – AN OVERVIEW OF THE TOURISM INDUSTRY AND THE TOURIST**

### **2.1 Introduction**

The growth in the tourism and leisure sector has been seen globally; tourism has shown its promise as a new source of GDP growth that has great levels of sustainability in the future. With regards to this, this chapter provides an overview of the tourist industry in South Africa, highlighting the industry's broad operational context, the importance of tourism in South Africa as well as the distinction between foreign and domestic tourism. The chapter concludes with insight as to how tourists are motivated to travel and how the nature of promotion in tourism is evolving.

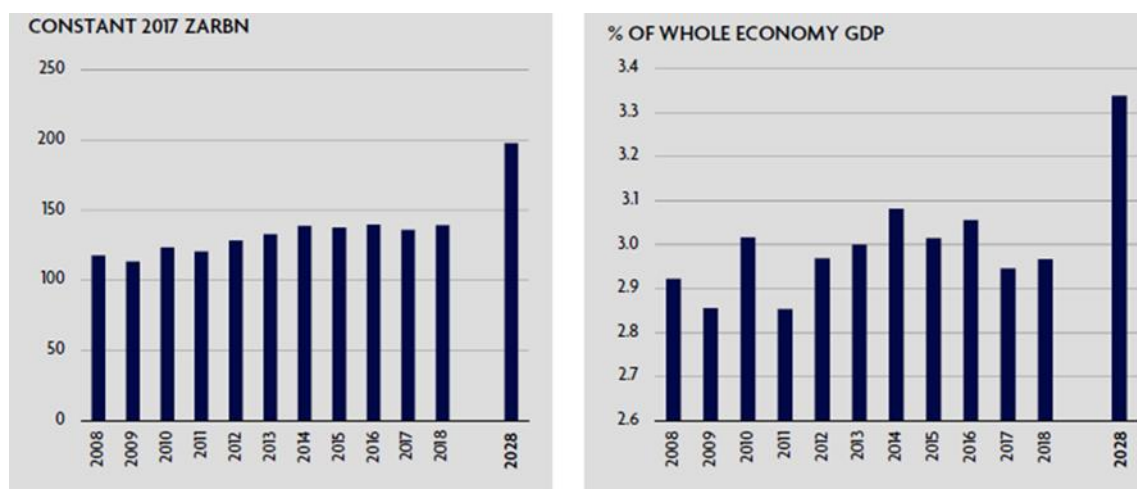
### **2.2 Tourism**

Tourism comprises all the activities of a person that travels to a place that is foreign to their usual environment for a period no longer than one consecutive year either for leisure, business or some other purpose (Statistics South Africa, 2017). It is important for a distinction to be made between tourism and travel as the two are often considered one and the same, however, are fundamentally different. In order for tourism to occur there must be a displacing event, whereby the individual makes use of any transportation means that may be available to them. (Statistics South Africa, 2017). Furthermore, the purpose in which the travel occurs should be for a purpose of which is different to that, that the individual would normally associate remuneration with. Lastly, the duration of the individual's displacement should not be for a period more than one year (UNWTO, 2017).

According to Statistics South Africa (2017), tourism is associated with all the activities that are undertaken by an individual in the process of travelling to destinations that are away from their normal permanent environment. Tourism could also be viewed as a temporary movement of a person from the place that they normally reside, including the provision of facilities to cater for this movement (Holloway and Taylor, 2006). What is clear from literature on tourism, is that tourism is essentially all activities performed in catering for the needs of people, during the course of their movements that occur away from their usual residence.

## 2.2.1 Significance of tourism in South Africa

The tourism sector in South Africa is vitally important to the economy and needs to be nurtured in order to promote sustainable growth, which is inclusive of all tourism marketers. This is supported by recent data collected by the World Travel and Tourism Council. In their work, they showed that the tourism sector which employs 726500 employees had directly contributed ZAR136.1billion to the South African GDP in 2017, this equates to 2.9% of total GDP (World Travel and Tourism Council, 2018). This has been forecasted to increase significantly in 2018 to ZAR139.3billion (World Travel and Tourism Council, 2018). This contribution primarily reflects the contributions made by airlines, travel agents, hotels, and other passenger transport services as well as food and beverage and leisure activities industries patronized by tourists. When the scope of travel and tourism is broadened to encompass the greater effects of investments, supply chain activities and induced income, the industry is forecasted to increase its contribution from ZAR412.5billion to ZAR424.9billion in 2018, this represents 10.1% of GDP (World Travel and Tourism Council, 2018). This is illustrated in Figure 2.1 below.

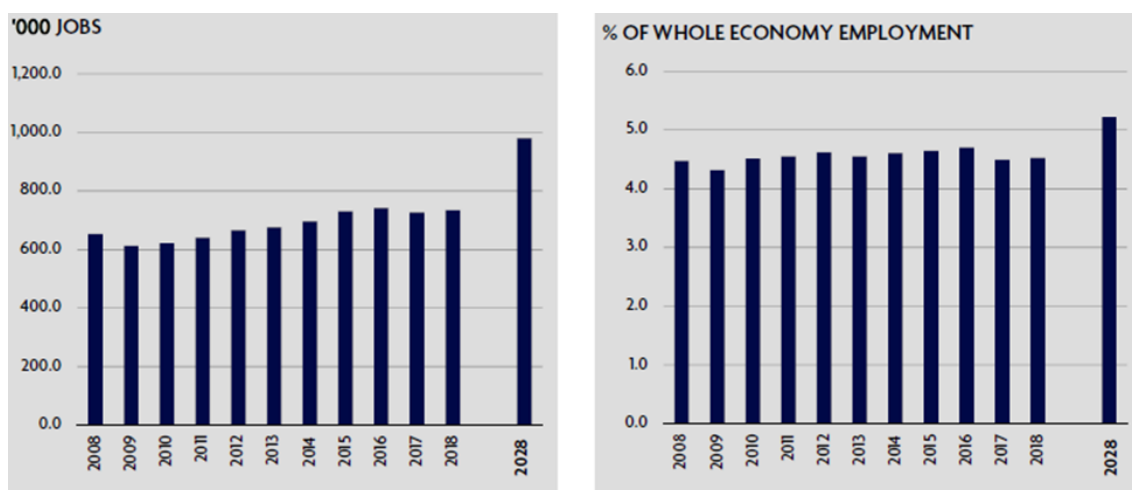


**Figure 2.1: Impact of tourism on South African Economy**

**Source: Adapted from World Travel and Tourism Council (2018)**

In terms of job creation, the tourism sector had outperformed other key industries such as trade and utilities by adding 40000 new jobs (Statistics South Africa, 2017). The growth of the South African tourism industry, also added jobs to the economy in a period in which the manufacturing sector had reduced 125 000 jobs (Statistics South Africa, 2017). South Africa has seen tremendous growth in tourism since becoming a republic; the sector is now one of the key economic components of the country. The continued growth in the sector as well as

the ability for the sector to continuously add jobs to the economy during low economic growth, shows the ability of the industry to meet the objectives of the country, in terms of poverty alleviation, job creation and economic growth. The tourism industry contributed 726500 jobs to the South African economy representing 4.5% of total employment, this is forecasted to rise to 734000 in 2018 (World Travel and Tourism Council, 2017). Figure 2.2 below illustrates the tourism effect on employment.



**Figure 2.2: Tourism effect on employment**

**Source: Adapted from Statistics South Africa (2018)**

### 2.2.2 Domestic versus international tourism

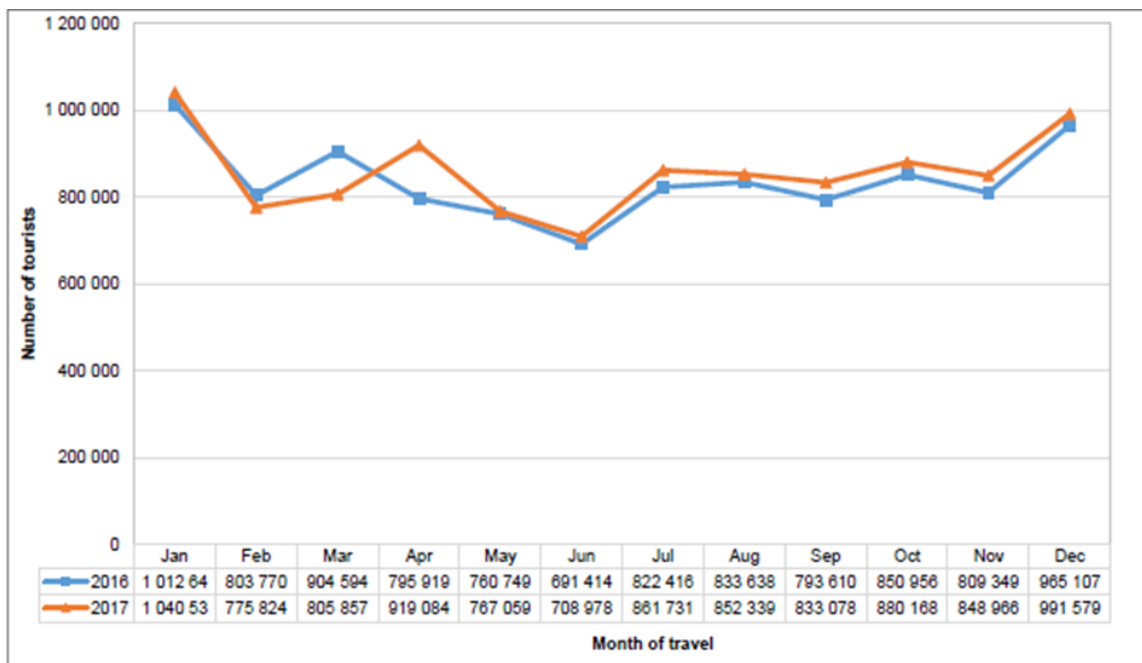
Domestic travel requires a resident of one country to travel within the border of that country (Statistics South Africa, 2017). An example would be a traveller that travels from Durban to Johannesburg. Domestic tourists do not cross international borders; thus, they do not require a visa or a passport, and furthermore there is no need to convert their money to that of a foreign currency. During seasonal holidays within a country, many people travel to different parts of their resident country. Residents of countries that have larger scope, such as South Africa, have a greater propensity to engage in domestic travel. The impact of domestic travel to the economy is not in the creation of additional income but is rather the redistribution of income through the creation of employment.

In most developing countries, tourism bodies in conjunction with government, focus primarily on the promotion of international tourism, since international tourists bring new money into the economy as opposed to domestic tourism that merely redistributes income

within the boundaries of the country (Mazimhaka, 2007). However, in reality, domestic tourism is the foundation of a country’s tourism industry, as it takes place throughout the year, whereas international tourism has peak seasons. International tourism is also strongly impacted by factors such as crime and safety. These are factors that do not impact domestic tourism to such a large extent as it would international tourism (Rogerson and Lisa, 2005).

### 2.3 Tourists

According to data presented by Statistics South Africa (2017), the number of foreign tourists that visited South Africa in 2017 was 10285197, this represented an increase of 2.4% from the 2016 figure (10044163). Figure 2.3 shows that, the month which had the highest number of arrivals was January 2017, while June 2017 received the lowest amount of arrivals. Furthermore, we see that monthly tourist arrivals in 2017 were higher than that of 2016. Figure 2.3 also shows some diversity in regard to the monthly arrival patterns of tourists. The highest number of holiday tourists was recorded in January 2017 compared to the highest amount of business travellers in November. Figure 2.3 below illustrates tourist visitors to South Africa.



**Figure 2.3: Tourist visitors to South Africa**

Source: Statistics South Africa (2017)

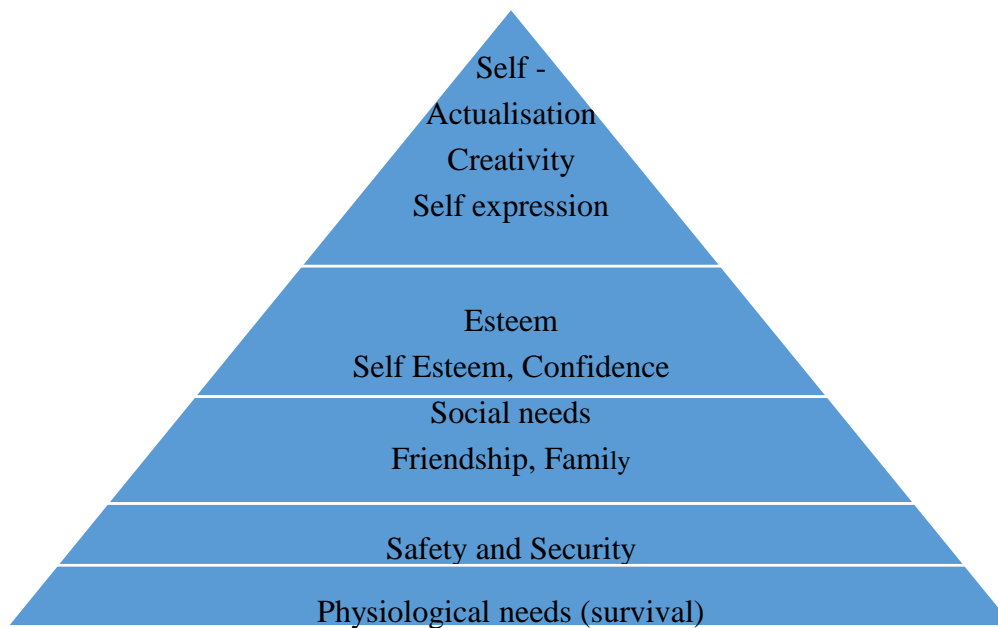
### **2.3.1 Tourist motivation**

A central theme to the theories of motivation is the existence of a need (Khuong and Ha, 2014). It is this need that evokes a response from the tourist. In order to understand this basic human motivation, it is necessary to determine the needs people have and how they go about satisfying these needs.

Maslow (1943) as cited in Nyagi, Ndivo and Manyara (2017), attempted to understand how needs fit into human life and the extent that they influence an individual during different stages of one's life. Maslow's hierarchy of needs theory is one of the most studied and adopted theories on motivation today and can be applied to various fields of study, including tourism (Nyagi *et al.*, 2017). In his theory, he argues that if none of the needs in the hierarchy are met an individual will resort to achieving the lowest need in the hierarchy being physiological. Once these needs are met, the individual will move on to fulfilling the next need in the hierarchy and the process will continue until each level of need was satisfied (Maslow, 1943).

However, this theory was challenged by Witt and Write (1992) as cited in Rani (2014) who did not believe that the hierarchy included many important needs such as play, abasement or dominance. Murray (1991) as cited in Fotis *et al.* (2012) classification scheme was seen as a more comprehensive approach and could be argued that tourism is more inclusive in that it lists fourteen physiological needs and thirteen psychological needs. However, most research in the field of tourism, view the work of Murray as not easily adoptable, although comprehensive.

In the attempt to understand the motivation of tourists, most authors identify with Maslow hierarchy of needs. In the application of this theory, tourism is seen as a need or want and tourism motivators are the connections to Maslow's list of needs. In the decision to travel, there are fundamentally two factors that have influence, push and pull factors. Figure 2.4 illustrates Maslows hierarchy of needs.



**Figure 2.4: Maslows hierachy of needs**

**Source: Adapted from Jisana (2014, p.36)**

### **2.3.2 Push factors of tourist motivation**

Tourists themselves are stimulated by their own needs toward a destination which they believe will bring them need satisfaction. In this way tourists act on their own physiological and psychological motivations to satisfy a need felt. In the identification of push factors, Dann (1977) as cited in Nyagi *et al.* (2017), put forward two motives for push factors: anomie and ego enhancement. The desire to rise above the feeling of isolation which can be obtained in the course of everyday life can be described as the anomie motive. The need for recognition that can be gained through the status received from travel, relates to the ego enhancement motive.

Crompton (1992) as cited in Khuong and Ha (2014) developed a framework that listed factors that he believed were push factors for tourists such as social interaction, prestige and relaxation. Beard and Ragheb (1983) as cited in Baniya and Paudel (2016) created The Leisure Motivation Scale that categorized push factors into broad characteristics such as social, intellectual, total mastery and the avoidance of stimulus. Leisure involves mental activities such as learning and discovery. The social component is the level of engagement in leisure activities for reasons that are social. The need for friendship and esteem are basic needs in social factors. Mastery, focuses on the level of the tourists' involvement in leisure activities (Baniya and Paudel, 2016). Lastly the avoidance of stimulus, speaks to the desire

to escape life situations which include the avoidance of social contact or to find solitude for the purpose of rest and relaxation.

From the work of academics, push motivation can be summarised as the emotive and internal features possessed by an individual that results in a consumption of products and services. (Reihanian, Hin, Kahrom, Mahmood and Porshokouh, 2015) noted that the amalgamation of such factors may act as the motivators which inspire individuals to travel. However, what should be noted is the highly complex nature of humans which could result in diverse individuals having different motivations that inspire them to travel. (Falcao, Damasio and Melo, 2015).

### **2.3.4 Pull factors of tourist motivation**

In the above discussion, push factors related to the factors that act as drivers for individuals to visit a destination. On the other hand, pull factors entice a tourist to a precise location after the desire to travel is induced (Khuong and Ha, 2014; Baniya and Paudel, 2016). Pull motivators are important in moulding a tourist's travel motivations and can enhance the individual's need to experience a destination. In this way the pull factors reinforce and strengthen the push motivators (Falcao *et al.*, 2015).

There are seven pull factors which include, culture, and budget, ease of travel, nature, facilities and multicultural location (Yuan and McDonald, 1990 as cited in Reihanian *et al.*, 2015). In addition, You, O'Leary, Morrison and Hong (2000) identified travel infrastructures, environment quality and safety as foremost attributes of destination choices that attract visitors. However, scholars have noted that tourists may travel for similar reasons, but the reason for the selection of a particular destination, as well as the importance placed on factors would vary due to the nature of a destination (Lee and Pearce, 2002; Khuong and Ha, 2014; Baniya and Paudel, 2016).

Crouch, Perdue, Timmermans and Uysal (2004) as cited in Mutinda and Mayaka (2012) encapsulated the many factors that combine to bring a tourist to a destination known as pull factors. Such factors were recorded to possess criteria that concluded the chosen destination thus further contributing to generate the destination experience. Hence, the concept of a tourist destination being a collection of tourist products, services and goods that are consumed under the same brand name that offer an integrated consumer experience, from which perceptions are formed are known as pull factors to a specific destination.

In contradiction, Pearce, Morrison and Rutledge (1998) as cited in Falcao et al. (2015) made the argument that assigning motivational influences to pull factors is difficult, in that these attributes can often be construed as socio-psychological motives. Hence, an individual attribute may represent a collection of motives to different people, some could view it as push factors while to others it may be viewed as pull factors. This supports the view that push and pull motivations should not be seen as independent to each other, but rather related and work together in creating the reason for travel (Kim, 2008).

From the literature reviewed, it is clear that push and pull factors are imperative in evoking travel responses. However, it is in how we view the workings of these factors that is imperative. These factors should not be seen as standalone factors, working separately to achieve the same goal, but rather as inter-related. On one hand, the push factors cause individuals to leave their homes and decide on travelling while pull factors lure the consumer into a chosen destination. Hence, matching the characteristics are central to a destination to the needs of potential visitors (Khuong and Ha, 2014; Falcao *et al.*, 2015; Baniya and Paudel, 2016).

## **2.4 Tourism promotion**

Pomering, Noble and Johnson (2011) stated that promotion is an organisation's attempt to persuade consumers as to the products and services that they offer. Within the tourism industry, promotion is by and large, the most crucial of the four P's of marketing mix; the others being place, product and price (Ponnam and Balaji, 2014). According to Bujdoso, Manhas, David and Nedelea (2013) tourism is a form of service that insinuates the value of promotion, as a fundamental element in the industry. The promoting of tourism destinations requires a particular form of communication, which consists of finding unique ways in transmitting information that is meant to inform a potential tourist, as to the characteristics of a destination.

According to Fotis, *et al.* (2012) tourism can be encouraged when communication effectively targets both potential and current tourists. However, according to Neascu (2014), today's customers no longer possess the same level of trust in corporate messages, as they previously have. Social media has become the means of effective communication with customers in the tourism industry. Neascu (2014) highlighted that the promotion of tourism should emphasise positive characteristics of a destination, thus creating a positive attitude toward tourism

products, and thus allowing for consumers to be more readily influenced to purchase such products. Milwood, Marchiori and Zach (2013) stated that information from sources that are external to the destination can have significantly greater influence on a tourist purchase behaviour, which has culminated in the use of social media tools for destination marketers.

## **2.5 Conclusion**

This chapter focused on providing the overview of the tourism industry and the tourist. In doing so, the chapter highlighted the significance of tourism to the South African economy, through its contributions to GDP, job creation and employment. The chapter also distinguished the differences between foreign and domestic tourists as well as how tourists are motivated in light of literature reviewed. Thus, this chapter has established the context in which the following chapters will build upon through the reviewing of literature. The next chapter is a review of literature regarding social media. The scope of such review is based on the research objectives of the study.

## **CHAPTER THREE – SOCIAL MEDIA LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **3.1 Introduction**

The aim of this study is to explore the role of social media on tourist consumer behaviour within the travel process. Hence, it is necessary to obtain a detailed understanding of social media. This chapter begins by briefly introducing the World Wide Web by looking at its origins, evolution and the impact of the internet on consumers. The chapter continues by defining the subject to be examined: social media. Towards this end, the issues that emerged are those surrounding the definition of social media and its taxonomy. In addressing these issues existing studies have been reviewed critically. A review of the different categories of social media follows. The chapter concludes by reviewing literature on the role of social media in tourism and the way in which tourist's process social media content.

### **3.2 A Brief history of the World Wide Web**

For a clearer understanding of the role of social media on consumer behaviour in the tourism industry, it is necessary to detail an overall overview of the advancement of the World Wide Web and the implications of the web. Web 2.0 and social media are closely related; hence this consideration is imperative.

In 1990, the European Organisation for Nuclear Research, agreed to an offer to subsidize the growth of a programme that would universally link all information systems (Fitzpatrick, 2017). A network programmer, Tim Berners-Lee proposed the idea with the mind set of overcoming the organisational hurdles in managing the information of vast research projects as well as the numerous platforms used for the storing of information (Fitzpatrick, 2017). In doing so, he created a system that would meet the administrative and management problems to be encountered worldwide, in the future (Tyagi, 2012).

In 1990, Berners-Lee introduced four critical developments that can be called the foundation for the internet. (Fitzpatrick, 2017). First, there was a code for a language, so computers were able to communicate, known as Hypertext Transfer Protocol (Andrews, 2017). Second was a universal resource identifier of addresses. Third, was a browser to search the web which is commonly called the World Wide Web (Andrews, 2017). Lastly, the means of formatting and making changes to web pages through a hypertext mark-up language and the World Wide Web, as we know it today, was created, allowing people to share and combine

knowledge through a web of hypertext documents (Griffiths, 2002). Hence, this study defines the web as a system of interlinked hypertext documents such as videos, images, texts, that can be accessed over the internet.

### **3.3 The internet and Web 2.0**

Web 2.0 is a concept that was introduced by O'Reilly (2005) and refers to the second creation of services and applications that are founded on the internet. Through Web 2.0, sites have the ability to allow for greater interaction and collaboration of users, whereas previously, users were limited to viewing content of a passive nature (Tyagi, 2012). It can be suggested that Web 2.0 has had such a significant role in the tourism sector, with the ever-increasing rise of content shared through blogs, social networking sites, travel forums and review platforms, a new name Travel 2.0 was formulated (Mendez, Leiva and Fernandez, 2015).

According to Howison, Finger, and Hauschka (2014), Web2.0 has triggered an evolution in traditional business models in a variety of industries and sectors, most notably tourism. The internet and the ever-increasing acceptance of social media by consumers has transformed the way in which marketers communicate with their customers and has transformed communication strategies in tourism (Zeng, 2013).

Social media through the strength of Web 2.0 has allowed for the empowerment of businesses and consumers to participate more frequently and easily, in service delivery procedures. (Sigala, Gretzel and Christou, 2012). Social media is not a new concept, however, it's proliferation across industries of varying nature has accelerated academic discussion recently (Fuchs, 2012). The influence of the internet and its platforms such as social media are so great that it has broken down geographical barriers associated with traditional marketing (Alexiadis and Refanidis, 2016). This view is reinforced by Loda (2014) who maintains that the businesses in tourism have changed and evolved through the digital revolution.

Luliana, Luigi and Mihaj (2013) also concurs in stating that Web2.0 and social media has changed the way information is communicated to tourists, due to its distinct characteristics such as increased interaction and the ability to provide information whenever it is demanded, and furthermore the ability to store vast amounts of information on virtual platforms while incurring a low cost of establishment.

Al Kailani and Kumar (2011) highlights that the internet enables marketers to reach a global market in that customers can find, choose and purchase commodities and services worldwide. Loda (2014), on the contrary argues that the internet should not be compared with other mediums and should rather be studied as a stand-alone medium.

### **3.4 Online marketing**

Howison *et al.* (2014), refers to online marketing as the utilization of material and interaction technologies to deliver marketing information. Gay, Charlesworth and Esen (2007) states that online marketing builds and helps maintain relationships with customers in order to facilitate and promote the exchange of products and services in the attempt to meet the goals of both parties. At present, businesses have the opportunity to use online marketing in promoting their products and services (Howison *et al.*, 2014). Gay *et al.*, (2007) supports this view in stating that tourism businesses should use the interactivity of online platforms to meet the needs of a more diverse range of consumer needs.

Traditional marketing approaches are more evolved with pushing messages to a broad audience (Alkailani and Kumar, 2011). In this way, customers experience marketing information through newspapers, radio and television. In stark contrast, online marketing focus more specifically on the customer as an individual and thereby more customer oriented (Alkailani and Kumar, 2011). The internet allows for the access of information at any given time and allows customers to determine how, when and what to access (Howison *et al.*, 2014). Customers are now given more flexibility to demand information in accordance to their needs. This results in consumers being able to determine the information content that they want to view, when they want to view and for as long as they want, has resulted in a new pull marketing strategy (Pomering *et al.*, 2011).

The ability for online marketing to allow for interactivity has been its greatest advantage over traditional mediums of advertising, Gay *et al.* (2007). Businesses can now communicate with both existing and potential customers providing them information as to their products and services and build stronger relationships and strengthen loyalty (Howison *et al.*, 2014). According to Howison *et al.* (2014), social media has allowed for this increased interactivity. Social networks allow people that share similar interests to communicate and socialise with each other further, by allowing businesses the opportunity to network with their previous and new customers.

Chan and Guillet (2011), however, distinguishes that despite being web based, social media should not be considered similar to online marketing but rather as a subset of it. Howison *et al.* (2014) suggested that social media has become more prominent through the rise of Web 2.0. Tuten (2008), as cited in Schiopu, Padurean, Tala and Nica (2016) attempted to define Web 2.0 as the progression in technology that allows for greater online interactivity whereby user control and dialogue is characterized within that environment. Both authors view Web 2.0 as technology that connects people and allows them to be creators of their own content to also communicate with others (Schiopu *et al.*, 2016). This has very strong implications to the tourism industry which is associated with being a people's business (Munar and Jacobson, 2014).

### **3.5 Social Media**

Hays, Page and Buhalis (2013), considers social media as the actions and behaviours of people who gain and share information online. Safko (2010) views social media as the medium that people use to be social. Bulgurcu, Cavusoglu and Benbasat (2010), refer to social media as a collection of online communities for sharing information. These online communities reflect different user type's whose interactions between others form a disposition for participation.

In the attempt to define social media, Iblasi, Bader and Al-Qreini (2016), first defined the term media as a communication tool , such as radio or the newspaper, thus he described social media as a social instrument that enables communication. Ioanas and Stoica (2014), describes social media as networks that enable users of similar interest to connect with each other. Kaplan and Haenlein (2010),states that social media is a series of content on the internet which is built on the conceptual foundations of Web 2.0 which allow for the generation and exchange of data created by users. Hoffman, Blei, Wang and Paisley (2013), take a slightly different view on social media, stating that it is a combination of tools and applications:

*“The set of web-based and mobile tools and applications that allow people to create (consume) content that can be consumed (created) by others and which enables and facilitates connections”* Hoffman *et al.* (2013, pg. 29)

According to Leung, Law, Hoof and Buhalis (2013), social media is a concept that has brought about radical change in business to customer communication. Kang and Scheutt

(2013) state that social media is the most rapidly evolving and expanding communication technologies accessible in the Internet environment and implemented in tourism marketing.

However, most of these authors mentioned, associate social media with the facilitation of connectivity. For the majority of social media, this may hold true, however it cannot be said with certainty, that posting a review on Trip Adviser is an attempt by the holiday maker to seek a connection with other members on Trip Adviser. For the purpose of this study based on the discussion above social media is defined as applications that are web based which serve the primary function of sharing user generated content.

### **3.6 Social media and tourism marketing**

According to Hanna, Rohm, and Crittenden (2011), the elements of social media have had the ability to revolutionise marketing and promotional advertising. It can be said that because of this state of revolution, companies must now start to consider social media as an integral part of their marketing strategy (Rathonyi, 2013). It is the ability of social media as an agent of influence that its addition is a necessity. Fotis *et al.* (2012) also follows a similar view, in stating that companies can improve products and services by using social media platforms to better understand the customers' needs, thus providing a higher level of customer value which will lay a foundation for building stronger relationships with customers and ultimately attract new customers.

For marketers in the tourism industry social media represents a significant tool in communicating and engaging with customers (Hudson and Thal, 2013). This is an indication that marketing through social media should be a strategy and incorporated in the online marketing promotions of tourism businesses (Gay *et al.*, 2007 as cited in Gohil, 2015). It is imperative that tourism operators increase the intensity of online content and align the online world with online marketing approaches.

In a study of the role and impact of social media in tourism, Leung *et al.* (2013), shows the significance of social media on tourism. Social media landscape has shifted from merely a broadcasting medium to that of a participatory platform which allows tourists themselves to become the media. Hays *et al.* (2013), argues that social media has altered the dissemination of information and does not allow for ease of contributing opinions for individuals. However, what is apparent is that the way in which society consumes information, has radically changed. Luliana *et al.* (2013), supports this notion by indicating that through the use of

social media customers are able to communicate directly with friends and family. Furthermore, Safko (2012), takes the view that social media has become a more effective medium of marketing than that of traditional methods, as it allows for reciprocal communication.

Kaplan and Haenlein (2010), indicates the advantages of social media as it helps connect customers and develops relationships in a manner that is highly cost efficient. This is once more supported by Guo (2014), who talks about the effective channel of communication that allows for the engaging of customers through experience sharing. Laroche (2013) adds that social media is influential in effecting the perceptions and attitudes of consumers. Cusick (2013), further adds that social media is a global marketing tool that is cost effective.

It is the increased level of user flexibility to share information that has increased the bargaining power of customers and made social media imperative to customer decision making (Leung *et al.*, 2013). Social media has influenced a shift in marketing, from word of mouth to electronic word of mouth. This once again shows the significance of adopting social media in marketing and the impact it can have on tourism operators.

Hays *et al.* (2013), on the other hand, states that the course of interaction exposed by social media in the tourism industry does not necessarily include only producer-to-consumer, instead it can involve consumer-to-producer, consumer-to-consumer, in addition to one-on-one, several-to-one, one-to-several, or several -to-several. Such diversity could not be offered by conventional communication methods.

### **3.7 Social media taxonomy**

Safko (2012) states that the complete field of social media needs to be classified. Hudson and Thal (2013), maintains that some social media types cannot correspondingly satisfy both the personal needs and the requirements of the industry. Social networks sharing of video files, blogs, and micro-blogs platforms can be utilized mutually for tourism, business and personal reasons (Leung *et al.*, 2013).

There are many social media applications, such as social networks, video sharing, review sites, forums, blogs, podcasting, photo sharing, social tagging, online communities, news sites and individual websites, to name a few (Kang and Scheutt, 2013). Akar and Topcu

(2011), also adopts a similar approach in characterising the many applications of social media.

Kaplan and Haenlein (2010), depend on a methodical endeavour to grow and expand a classification structure. This strategy is founded on academic structures from social media linked disciplines: Media Research (social presence and media abundance) and social practices (presentation of oneself and disclosure of oneself). Kaplan and Haenlein (2010), categorises social media as follow: Social Networking Sites, Collaborative projects, Blogs, Virtual social worlds, Content communities and Virtual game worlds. However, what is apparent in literature is that there are great differences in the way authors attempt to categorise social media.

### **3.8 Types of social media**

#### **3.8.1 Social network sites**

Websites that allow people to meet virtually are referred to as Social Networking Sites. These websites allow individuals develop relationships, communicate and mould their personal profiles (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010). Social media sites have different options such as video sharing or photo sharing and it is these capabilities that define them individually from each other (Xiang and Gretzel, 2010). Social networking sites epitomise key platforms to which users can affiliate and become members, establish a profile, and create a personal network linking them to other users and their own content can be shared (Boyd and Ellison 2007; Kaplan and Haenlein 2010; Kietzmann, Hermkens, McCarthy and Silvestre, 2011).

Expedia (2017) claimed that 29 % of all adults in the United States of America whom returned home after their travels had posted content such as photos, relating to their holiday. Stankov, Lazic and Dragicevic (2010) stresses the important role that Facebook plays for tourism organisations and encouraged the exploiting of features available on social network sites for tourist marketers.

White and Thompson (2010) focuses on content analysis of travel photos that had been published on Facebook in exploring their role in influencing travel plans of viewers. The study suggested that photos did generate interest in the viewers of such content. Furthermore, the study found that there are two types of photos published; the first being with human

content and second without, the suggestion was made that those photos that included humans were more likely to receive a comment from other users.

Bulencea and Egger (2013) conducts a study that enabled participants to perform only travel related information search and it was found that social networking sites only provided information that was relevant to attractions. The study posits that information regarding transportation and accommodation was inadequate. Michopoulou (2013) makes the claim that travellers, when on holiday, do not make use of Facebook as a source of information. The study found that Facebook was used heavily during and after a holiday largely due to the motivation to share travel experiences with relatives and friends.

### **3.8.2 Blogs and micro Blogs**

Blogs and Micro-Blogs also refer to websites allowing a blogger to share their perceptions of an area of personal interest or experience (Chan and Guillet, 2011). It is through the posting of comments or digital diaries that they interact with followers. Blogs can be based on images, texts, videos or audio clips. Another form of blogs are micro blogs; they function in the same manner as blogs although they are limited in terms of the size of content that can be posted (Gunelius, 2014). In the tourism industry, numerous instances of blogs prevail, and some popular blog platforms include, Travel Planet, Igougo, Twitter, Trip Advisor and Real travel (Xiang and Gretzel, 2010).

With regards to the issue of trust and credibility regarding online travel-based blogs and websites, a number of studies exist. Mack, Behler, Roberts and Rimland (2008) posits that personal as well as corporate travel blogs are viewed as significantly less trusted by travellers compared to traditional sources, a possible factor for such findings are potentially in the assumptions to the nature of the social interactions between viewers and the creators of messages. Hence, blogs would receive word of mouth from strangers, which could be viewed as less trusted by viewers over content that had come from a source that they had known and received prior information that proved trustworthy. The findings of the study have left speculation for blogs to grow with regards to the level of trust and reliability that blogs could generate (Technorati, 2010).

Yoo and Gretzel (2011) examines how various factors influenced the level of trust amongst websites that had been host to user generated content, as well as how this had affected travel plans. In their study, they showed that user generated content was perceived as more trusted

when posted to official sites such as a department of tourism page or travel agents' websites. Prayag *et al.* (2017) opposed this, stating that travel blogs were only found to be second to online travel agents that had included review/ratings features to their sites.

Wang, Chen and Liang (2011) suggests a model that included intellectual and cyber-interactive aspects that had an influence on a destinations image and the intention to travel. The results of the study showed that travel blogs could be viewed as a strong predictor of a potential tourists travel intention. Factors that were shown to be of significance to travels were social influence, the generation of empathy, cognitive images and cyber influence.

Lastly, in the case of the selecting of destinations that are unfamiliar to the traveller, travel blogs showed that they provided advice that was better than that received from friends and relative, due to reduced subjectivity of the blogs as well as what was seen to be information that was more relevant to travellers (Tan and Chen 2012, Chung and Koo, 2015).

### **3.8.3 Collaborative projects**

Collaborative projects aim to aggregate online communities through the dependence of users in working out the content (Hill, Dean and Murphy, 2013). Collaborative communities are classified into two types, social book-marking sites and Wikis. Individuals are helped to manage social bookmarking sites and administer their online collection of links and to share these with others (Chung and Koo, 2015). Wikis are sites that allow users to frequently update, modify and edit in order to enhance the quality of content. Other users are able to share links stored online (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010).

Gretzel and Yoo (2008) states that travellers took part in consumer reviews at all stages of planning their holiday, especially in the accommodation space. Their study found that consumer review sites increased the level of confidence of travellers and helped in trip planning. According to Vermeulen and Seegers (2009), trust in hotels are increased through the exposure of both negative and positive comments that are viewed by travellers on review sites. Sparks and Browning (2011) claims that reviews that were positively framed and focused on interactive service gained a greater measure of trust amongst readers. Tan and Chen (2012) asserted that Wikipedia was viewed as travel related information source for travellers, furthermore Wikipedia had been viewed more relevant than traditional sources of information such as books and magazines.

### **3.8.4 Virtual worlds**

Online applications that resembles the real world within a 3D background is referred to as Virtual worlds. Epitomized by a tailor-made character resembling a human or an image, people could network in a simulated environment with others (Chan and Guillet, 2011).

Arsal, Backman and Baldwin (2010) maintains that 31% of virtual forums had had an influence in the travel plans of its members. The study found that similarities between member interests and the forum topic had a direct relationship with those members' intentions to purchase products discussed on the forum. Gunelius (2014), states that during information search in the pre- trip stage, travel forums provided travellers with a more direct route to access information from residents of a specific destination. Casalo, Flavian and Guinaliu (2010), suggests that there are repercussions of varying levels of consumer participation with regards to virtual travel worlds. As such inference is made to the extent that virtual worlds can have on the information processing of consumers, in that it can fill an information void or result in further complication.

### **3.9 The social information processing theory**

The theory of social information administration offers a clear viewpoint to examine how interpersonal stimulus is processed by the utilisation of social media. This argument is supported by the underlying principle that connotation and meaning is created socially and social settings and circumstances presents a crucial basis of information and indicators about individual's actions and perceptions (Tham, Croy and Mair, 2013). It is vastly different from the conventional face-to-face perspectives since data conveyed on social media avenues expanded from ordinary, casual language to communicative languages such as video, text, audio, and rich media (Tham *et al.* 2013).

Also different from face-to-face situations, is that a greater number of individuals and entities can become connected by informational links rather than traditional means of communication. Social media is also different to conventional face-to-face situations since a reduced effort is required by people intending to influence more people. Hence, individuals are inspired to share information and experiences using their own natural instincts (Grunelius, 2014). Communication on social media that is computer-mediated acknowledges immediacy of opinions and feedback which offers an unparalleled capacity to link people chronologically and simultaneously. According to Guo (2014), the effect of

social media is widespread and more convincing compared with traditional mass media, though the ability of social media to impact a greater number of people, the capacity to provide valuable information, and the marginal effort that is expected of individuals to generate influence endures. This theory, therefore, suggests that social media can be effectively applied in promoting tourism business.

### **3.10 The influence of social media on decision making**

The evolution of the internet has allowed for the progression of advertising from an online broadcasting medium to a platform that is participatory in nature, allowing for people to immerse themselves in the media and in some cases become the media themselves through the sharing of content (Li, Lin, Tsai and Wang, 2015). Hensel and Deis (2010), make the argument that consumers can make such participation due to the ability of Web 2.0 in allowing for the exchanging of user content and experiences.

Burgess and Bank (2014) concurs with the above view, emphasising the popularity that social media use has gained, further highlighting that social networking is one of the most popular activities online globally. Social media platforms have effectively reached 82% of the total internet population, this equates to roughly 1.2 billion online users, as such the potential for social media as an effective means to communicate is apparent (Burgess and Bank, 2014). Through this high level of interactivity between marketers and consumers, the promotion of social collaboration and networking is increased. In this context, social media can be viewed in stark contrast to traditional mediums of marketing and media, as information can now be created by the consumer rather than just received from marketers.

Numerous studies have attempted to investigate the use of social media in tourism by travellers (Sanchez, Franco and Rondon-Cataluna, 2010; Leung *et al.*, 2013; Gursoy *et al.*, 2018). Gursoy *et al.* (2018) suggests that social media is a useful tool for the managing of customer relations, as it allows for the connection of travellers through unique features that appeal to them. Leung *et al.* (2013) posits that the utilisation of social media has provided tourism companies the opportunity to understand the needs of consumers better and thus be able to more effectively market products to them.

### **3.12 Conclusion**

Hence, for the hospitality and travel sector, the increased use of the Internet, and the surge in popularity of social channels has altered consumer behaviour and tourism marketing. From searching likely destinations, the online activities that consumers participate in once reaching their destinations, and the ways social media is used to make purchasing decisions has influenced the holiday process from start to finish.

Tourism will have to involve their vacationers with multichannel cohesive interactions and inspire them to invite dialogue about and recommend beneficial experiences. Engaging with tourists on real-time social media has enormous consequences for the travel industry. Tourists' present encounter with the innovative digital technology, helps them expand services while making their online experiences more tailored and far more appropriate. Hence, the next Chapter details the literature surrounding consumer behavior and the many factors to be considered that triggers responses and feedback from consumers using social media platforms.

## **CHAPTER 4: CONSUMER BEHAVIOUR LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **4.1 Introduction**

This study aimed to investigate the role of social media in influencing tourist consumer behaviour within the holiday travel process. Hence, it is considered necessary to begin by providing a thorough explanation and understanding of consumer behaviour and how social media has allowed for consumer generated content to influence the impression of a destination portrayed to the public.

Marketers, as such are therefore provided with a better understanding of the reasons behind the decisions of the consumers in the marketplace, which influences consumers at various stages of their purchase, thereby accomplishing valuable and resourceful use of marketing material. The behaviour of consumers is considered a theoretical topic of enquiry, an offshoot of advertising methods that provides accurate data about the complexity of human behaviour (McInnis, Valerie and Folkes, 2010).

Hence, this chapter commences with an examination of the various factors -personal, situational, psychological, and social, cultural —that influences peoples' purchase decisions before, during and after a trip. The chapter then continues to an analysis of the foremost comprehensive consumer behaviour theories and models that offer insight into the buying behaviour patterns of consumers.

### **4.2 Consumer behaviour**

Consumer behaviour is an enormous and highly complex field of study. The complexity lies in the ambiguity of the field in that predicting how consumers may behave in each situation with accuracy is highly unlikely if not nearly impossible. Marketers continuously strive to affect the behaviour of consumers to influence their needs and desires (Ahraf, Naeem and Shahzadi, 2017). Ultimately the success of marketing effort rests on the ability to understand how consumers go about making purchase decisions and thus aligning strategic marketing plans around this.

Williams, Crittenden, Keo and McCarty (2012) describe consumer behaviour as all activities related to consumption, stimuli and ideas that occur prior to the trip, for the duration of the trip and also after an actual purchase as performed by consumers of products and services

and those whom influence the purchase. Schiffman, Kanuk and Hansen (2008) define consumer behaviour as that which users reveal in their search while acquiring, consuming, appraising and utilizing of commodities, services and ideas which is expected to satisfy their needs.

Kotler and Keller (2012) refer to consumer behaviour as the study of how individuals, companies and groups go about organising, selecting, purchasing and using products and services to satisfy an immediate and future need. Kotler and Keller (2012) continues to argue that consumer behaviour is largely influenced by factors, these factors are social, individual, and cultural.

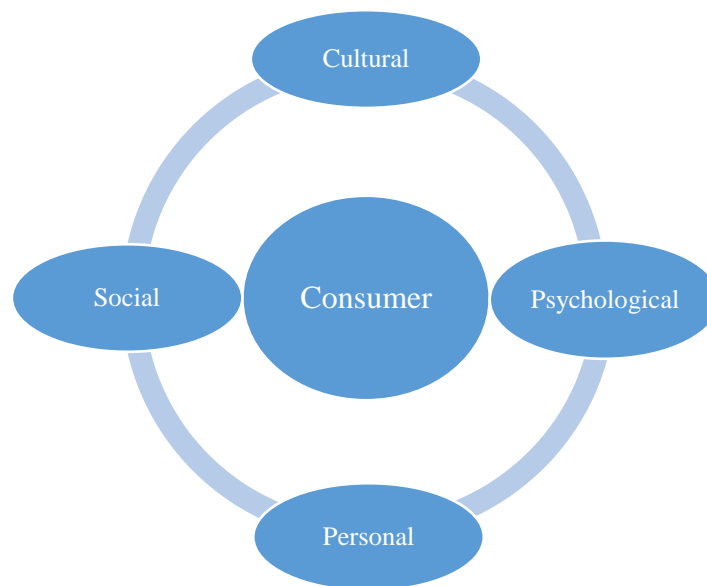
Scholz (2014) state that purchasing activity identifies two main methods – the first being socially focussed behaviour and the second being personally focused behaviour. Behaviour that is socially focussed originates from the basic necessity to make an impression on others whilst behaviour that is personally focussed is determined by intrinsic factors and possesses an aspect of self-satisfaction and fulfilment (Buhalis and Foerste, 2013). Scholz (2014), furthermore states that cultural and psychological characteristics further impacts purchasing strategies.

In reviewing the work of various authors, consumer behaviour can be viewed as the way in which individual consumers act in the attempt to use and obtain services. This activity revolves around a decision process and is influenced by personal traits and elements within the environment relating to an individual.

### **4.3 Factors affecting consumer behaviour**

An individual's choice to purchase or spending practices is shaped by several elements that oscillates from psychological, cultural, social and personal factors (Rani, 2014). Hence, it becomes imperative to comprehend and determine such factors in order to formulate more valuable and resourceful advertising approaches that will confidently satisfy purchasers' wants and needs. Buying a clothing attire or purchasing food at a local store is very different to, for example, purchasing a holiday. More resources and more time and consideration are needed. Furthermore, consumers also have higher expectations with regards to the service offered (Mason, 2014). Consumers also display incessant changes with regards to preferences and are thus influenced by several external and internal issues throughout their decision-making efforts (Rani, 2014). As such, the behaviour of consumers is important and

needs careful consideration in all marketing procedures. It plays a crucial function in explaining and providing insight into why people select certain commodities and destinations. For marketing personnel to utilize marketing strategies efficiently, it is vital for them to take cognisance of how consumers' decisions are reached and additionally, what factors have an impact on them. Figure 4.1 illustrates the factors that influence consumer behaviour.



**Figure 4.1: Factors that influence consumer behaviour**

**Source: Adapted from Kotler and Armstrong (2013, p. 137)**

### **4.3.1 Cultural and social factors**

#### **4.3.1.1 Culture**

Many scholars have attempted to define culture and debated its meaning, the difficulty is brought about due to the abstract nature of such a term (Northouse, 2016). Northouse (2016) discusses the difficulty in defining culture, but in his attempt, he defines culture as learned beliefs, values and traditions. According to Rani (2014), culture is a combination of a person's values, beliefs and learned behaviours that are formed from interactions with society and family. Thus, culture is ingrained in society and influences the individual's wants as well as behaviours (Monger, 2012). Most countries consist of culturally diverse communities, thus advertising promotions and campaigns recent endeavours, are to classify

the target markets in accordance to cultural diversity (Kotler and Keller, 2012). Marketers need to understand how culture influences the buying behaviour between countries or regions (Jisana, 2014).

#### **4.3.1.2 Subculture**

Within culture there are subcultures that exist between regions, religions, nationalities and racial groups (Northhouse, 2016). By breaking down culture into smaller segments such as subculture, provides a more detailed identification of the socialisation habits of consumers (Kotler and Armstrong, 2013). Subcultures can also exist between groups of people that have shared value systems that are created through common life experiences (Madhavan and Chandrasekar, 2015).

#### **4.3.1.3 Social Class**

Kotler and Armstrong (2013) define social class as the relatively permanent divisions in a society whose members share similar values, interests and incomes. One's social class is determined by the hierarchical arrangement of society that is an element of social standing or one's social status (Jisana, 2014). According to Rani (2014), an individual's social class is an important determinant in buying behaviour due to its impact on consumption patterns, such as lifestyle, activities of individuals and even media patterns. Kotler and Keller (2012) states that social classes depict clear divisions in society which separate consumers by their wants and needs. A consumers social standing shows the divisions in society and it is through social classes that consumer's consumption patterns are influenced.

#### **4.3.1.4 Reference Groups**

These refer to groups that influence either directly or indirectly one's attitude and ultimately behaviour (Rani, 2014). Individuals use these groups as points of reference in their own learnings and beliefs. A good example of reference groups is one's family, as they serve as primary points of reference in an individual's life, due largely to the frequency of contact, hence family and close friends can be considered primary sources of reference. Secondary sources of reference make up groups that have less and less frequent contact with an individual such as neighbours or colleagues.

### **4.3.2 Personal factors**

Factors such as lifestyle, economic situation, occupation, age, personality and self-concept all play a part in influencing a consumers behaviour (Madhavan and Chandrasekar, 2015). Jisana (2014) states that a person will tend to change their purchase patterns as they pass through their individual life cycles. Rani (2014) indicates that personal considerations include age, gender, personality, social status, profession and various other demographical qualities of an individual. Since these differ from one individual to the next, it is clear that purchasing actions of certain groups of consumers also varies.

#### **4.3.2.1 Lifestyle**

The lifestyle of individuals refers to the way in which a person lives and interacts in society (Jisana, 2014). The individual's lifestyle is an expression of their surroundings and is determined by their interests and activities which shapes the pattern of their interactions with the world (Kotler and Armstrong, 2013). An individual's lifestyle has close connections to the social roles that they play in society. An understanding of the lifestyle factor can enable marketers to understand how changing consumer values affect buying behaviour. Consumers do not just buy products, rather they buy the values and lifestyles that are associated with them.

#### **4.3.2.2 Economic position**

The economic position of a consumer will also greatly influence the products they attempt to buy (Kotler and Keller, 2012). A consumer that has higher disposable income will be more inclined to look at products with superior brand recognition and that are more expensive. On the contrary, a person with low disposable income will be forced to purchase relatively less expensive products.

#### **4.3.2.3 Age and life cycle**

As consumers pass through the passage of time, they experience different stages of life. During these different phases the needs of individuals change and ultimately their buying behaviour changes. The stages of one's life such as parenthood and retirement will call for marketers to develop strategies that target the needs of people in these different stages. Comparing young to adults, it is probable that adults may prefer different products from the young ones. In food products, adults may prefer to purchase healthier products compared to

the young ones (Rani, 2014). Sorce, Perotti and Widrick (2005) as cited in Lodhi and Shoaib (2017) have also observed that age differences and beliefs can alter and change online buying actions among consumers. Their findings have revealed that younger people look for more products online in comparison to their older counterparts (Lodhi and Shoaib, 2017). Younger people are comfortable with online shopping, finding it informative and convenient. Thus, younger consumers will spend more time engaging with online search engines. However, in terms of actually purchasing products online, the older ones are far more apt to purchase the products.

#### **4.3.2.4 Personality**

The personality of a consumer is a makeup of the unique psychological characteristics that lead to the constant response to one's environment (Kotler and Armstrong, 2013). Personality changes from person to person, time to time and place to place. Personality is the totality of behaviour of an individual in different circumstances (Madhavan and Chandrasekar, 2015). It has different characteristics such as: dominance, aggressiveness, self-confidence which can be useful to determine the consumer behaviour for product or service. Therefore, it can greatly influence the buying behaviour of customers.

#### **4.3.3 Psychological factors**

Rani (2014), specified that psychological factors include motivation, perception, learning as well as beliefs and attitudes that are a subset of learning. Ramya and Ali (2016), state that there are four psychological factors that most affect a consumer's buyer behaviour, these are, perception, motivation, learning and attitudes.

##### **4.3.3.1 Motivation**

Diallo, Chandon, Cliquet and Phillipe (2014) describes motivation as a compelling factor for consumers to reach a decision about purchasing, and, since it functions subconsciously, it implies that if a consumer has an urgent need for a specific product, then that person is more motivated to purchase that product.

The extent to which motivation influences the buying behaviour of consumers is related to the level of motivation that exists. People have different needs from physiological to social needs. It is the nature of the need that makes some more urgent than others (Ramya and Ali, 2016). Thus, as the urgency of the need increases, it becomes a motive directing a consumer

to seek satisfaction. Maslow (1943) theory of motivation helps explain why people are driven to satisfy certain needs at specific times. Maslow arranged the needs of humans in a hierarchy according to its importance (Ramya and Ali, 2016). In his work Maslow (1943) identifies human needs as physiological, safety, social, and self-actualisation. A person will first satisfy the most important needs and when that need is satisfied it will no longer be a motivator, the person will then try and satisfy their next most important need.

#### **4.3.3.2 Perception**

Choosing, establishing and understanding information in a manner to produce a meaningful understanding of the world is called perception. Two individuals that have the same need may not purchase the same or similar products and this is due to the differences in the individual's perceptions. According to Kotler and Armstrong (2013), when people are motivated, they are more willing and readier to act and how they act is a matter of influence which is directed by perception. Kotler and Armstrong (2013), further states that perception is a process in which people seek, organise and interpret information to develop a clearer picture of the world.

Diallo *et al.* (2014), states that there are three different perceptual processes: selective attention, selective distortion and selective retention. With regards to attention, individuals will pay more attention to information that they feel is more useful to them or to those that are in their immediate surroundings such as family members. Selective distortion differs in that it focusses on how a person perceives information they have received in a manner that is aligned to their beliefs (Cohen and Prayag, 2014). Selective retention relates to how a consumer remembers the information that they have received, useful information is stored while less useful information is disregarded.

#### **4.3.3.3 Beliefs and Attitudes**

A belief is a thought that a person has about something that is descriptive in nature. Attitude refers to a person's feelings or tendencies towards something (Kotler and Armstrong, 2013). Customers all have their own individual attitudes about products and services. It is these individual attitudes that make up the brand image that ultimately affect a consumer's purchase decision.

## **4.4 Theory and Models on Consumer Purchase Behaviour**

### **4.4.1 Traditional and Contemporary Models**

Concepts such as consumer behaviour and choice are complex in nature and are studied continuously by researchers (Rani, 2014). Companies allow their marketing departments to spend enormous amounts of resources in better understanding who their consumers are and what their current and future needs are (Siguencia and Marzano, 2017). An understanding of consumer behaviours provides companies with enhanced profitability and the creation of a sustainable competitive advantage over their competitors. The reviewing of previous studies helps current research in forming a framework to further extend the body of knowledge and increase understanding in this field through future research (Creswell, 2014). In the field of study, several models exist that attempt to explain the developments that trigger buying behaviour. According to Jisana (2014) consumer behaviour paradigms extend from conventional to present-day models.

#### **4.4.1.1 Traditional models**

A review of traditional models that attempt to explain the buying patterns of consumers include models such as economic, learning, psychoanalytical and sociological (Jisana, 2014).

#### **4.4.1.2 Economic model**

The economic model or also known as the rational perspective is a representation of consumer behaviour based on classic and neo-classic economic theory. The model assumes that consumers will seek to maximize the benefits that can be derived from a product while simultaneously minimizing costs (Goodhope, 2013). In a sense, consumers try to juggle between the constraints of their purchase power and their preferences while seeking to maximise their own utility by efficient allocation (Jisana, 2014).

Fotis (2015) states that this perspective explains the approach to decision making, stressing that in a rational approach, the objective is to maximise utility with the least effort. Utility theory serves as the groundwork for this model, in that it dictates the choices made according to outcome expected. This rational perspective requires that consumers are rational, aware of all options available and will select the optimum choice.

#### **4.4.1.3 Learning model**

Also known as the decision making or information processing perspective Holbrook and Hirschman (1982) as cited in Fotis (2015) take the view that consumers are problem solvers, therefore it places an emphasis on the consumers' process of disseminating information. Ramya (2016) state that the perspective places an importance on the ways in which consumers find information, store it and evaluate it. The environment should be considered as an influential element in providing stimuli or informational inputs that are used in the decision-making process. The major marketing implication for this perspective is that it requires consumers' exposure to information, to be influenced. Mowen (1988) as cited in Fotis (2015) who criticized this perspective, take the view that it fails to explain all aspects of buyer behaviour such as the effect of the environment.

#### **4.4.1.4 Psychoanalytical Model**

This perspective focuses more on the stimuli provided by the environment. This perspective has its roots in psychology and looks at decisions as a function of both the conscious and sub conscious mind (Jisana, 2014). The foundations of this model can be found in the work of Sigmund Freud in 1856 – Psychoanalytic Personality Theory. The interactions between instinct, ego and consciousness drives behaviour (Fotis, 2015). In this regard hidden symbols in a company logo or name could have an effect on a consumer's subconscious mind and result in influence to purchase that product.

#### **4.4.1.5 Sociological Model**

This model describes the individuals buying behaviour that is exposed to influences resulting from people in their social circles. Amongst the influences, those associations that are held in higher esteem have the strongest effect on the consumer (Varkaris and Neuhofer, 2017). Bearing this in mind, the consumer is inferred views in relation to the patterns of behaviour associated with these social groupings that make up his own behaviour.

#### **4.4.2 Contemporary Models.**

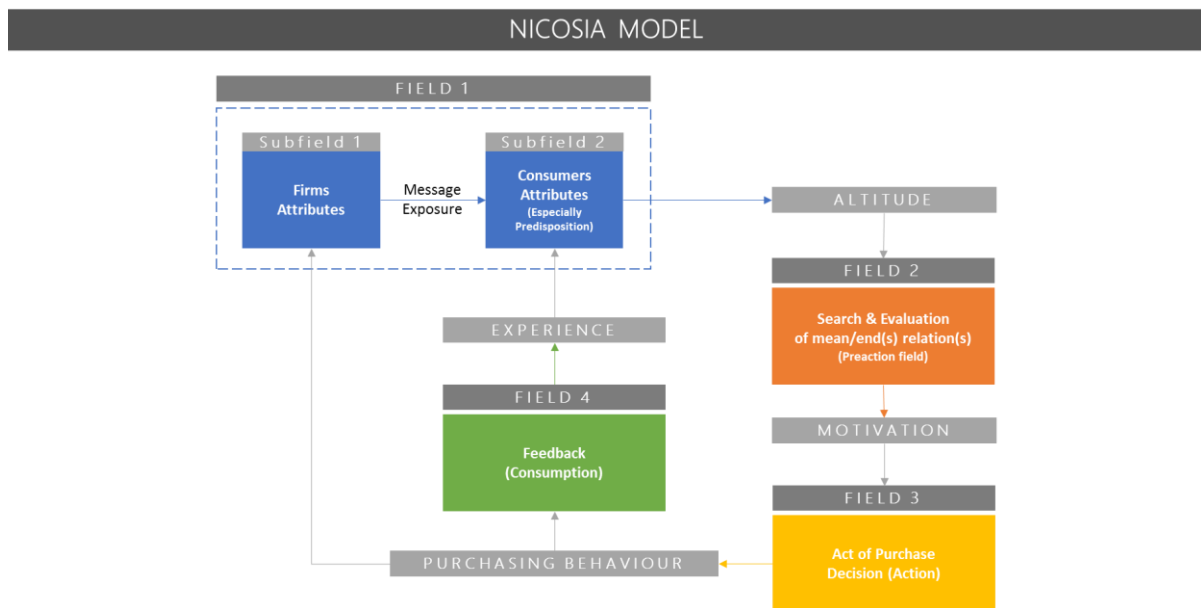
Madhavan and Chandrasekar (2015) lists the contemporary models of consumer behaviour. The listing comprised of the Nicosia model (1966); Engel Kollart and Blackwell model (1968); Howard and Sheth model (1969) and the Assael Model (1998).

#### **4.4.2.1 Nicosia Model**

Nicosia (1966) as cited by Goodhope (2013) was the architect of one of the earliest models explaining consumer behaviour. In his model, depicted in Figure 4.2, he showed the relationship between an organisation and its potential buyers. It is this link, that promotes the idea, that firms are responsible for transmitting messages to consumers in the pursuit of a reaction, that being a purchase (Madhavan and Chandrasekar, 2015). Thus, put in a simpler way, firms stipulate the influence on a customer and in return consumers influence the actions of firms. This model has provided marketers with an understanding of how to react on the progress of their strategies and campaigns (Goodhope, 2013).

The model suggested by Nicosia (1966), differs from that of the Engel Kollart Blackwell model and the Howard and Sheth model in that it takes into consideration perceived attributes of the organisation selling the product. Thus, the relationship that exists between the customer and the firm is emphasised. Nicosia (1966) model represents inputs and outputs of the consumer into four fields (Figure 4.2), illustrating that the firm and the consumer share a connectedness with each other, this implies that the firm tries to influence the consumer.

The model is further based on the assumption that buyers will pass through cognitive, affective and behavioural stages when there is a high degree of involvement with a product category (Kotler and Keller, 2012). Compared to the previous model, this model emphasises that individuals' interactions about their purchasing experiences may occur simultaneously or in sequence during an individual's decision-making process. Therefore, it has the relative advantage of showing the process as interactive.



**Figure 4.2 Nicosia model of consumer decision process**

**Source: Adapted from Jisana (2014, p. 41)**

#### 4.4.2.2 Engel-Kollat and Blackwell Model

The Engel, Kollart and Blackwell (1968) model has been used as the framework for many studies on the consumers' decision-making process. The model is depicted in Figure 4.3. Meng and Xu (2012), adopts this model as the framework for their study on understanding the factors that influence the tourist shopping behaviours. The authors took the position that this model was a logical means to explain the shopping behaviour of travellers, as they regarded this as a planned behaviour. In similar context, consumers decide if they need to make a purchase, and in doing so, what to purchase, as well as where to buy, all while weighing the benefits versus the costs of alternatives.

Similarly, Kim and Littrell (1999) as cited in Lodhi and Shoaib (2017), considers international tourists' travel and souvenir purchasing, with the aim of being able to predict tourists' intention to purchase souvenirs. In their study, this model was utilized to recommend relationships between the variables influencing tourists' souvenir-purchasing behaviour. As seen, the model has proven its ability to provide the means for adoption as a framework that can be widely utilised.

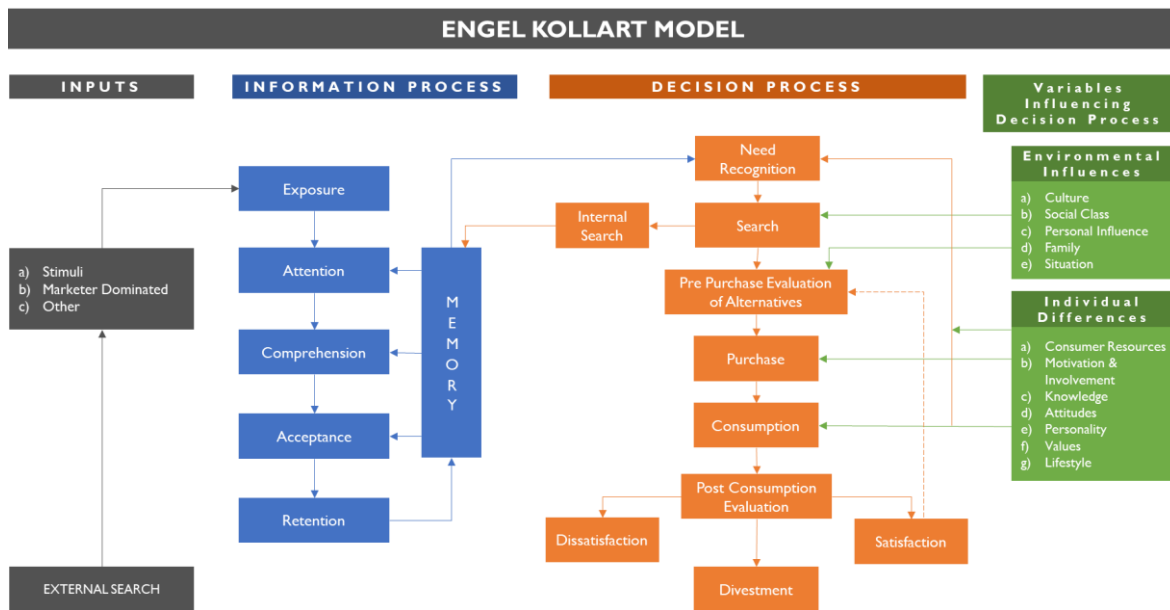
However, there have been criticism of the model in that it failed to clearly define the relationship that exists between its elements (Fotis *et al.*, 2012). Further, it failed to distinguish the factors that shape these elements, and as such, why different personalities

result in such great variety of decision making. The model has also come under criticism for its complexity, as well as its limited predictive capacity, as environmental and social influences are stressed (Williams, *et al.*, 2012)

Marketers also take issue with the model in that they believe it places far too much emphasis on the process of recognising a problem, as they believe that consumers usually recognise problems far too late in a marketing sense (Rice, 1997).

Considering the arguments for and against this model, there still exists the need to examine such models for the current research, due to the fact that the model starts the consumer decision making process in recognition of the assumption that the consumer has a problem that can only be resolved by making a purchase of a suitable product (Rani, 2014). Put forward in another manner, the consumer's problem may not be resolved without the engagement of the process of purchasing a product or service that is deemed suitable.

Although, this model has been developed over 40 years ago, it still provides important insights as to the development of influence that social media can have on a travellers' decision- making process through the various stages of their holiday process as fundamentally, the framework is still useful with its comprehensive and logical approaches. The problems of consumers can be more readily resolved when adopting social media in the digital era, as these developed tools are able to help consumers to search for more appropriate and favourable holiday products and services based on the usefulness of adopting it (Tussyadiah, 2012).



**Figure 4.3: Engel Kollart Blackwell Model**

**Source: Adapted from Engel *et al.* (1968, p. 35)**

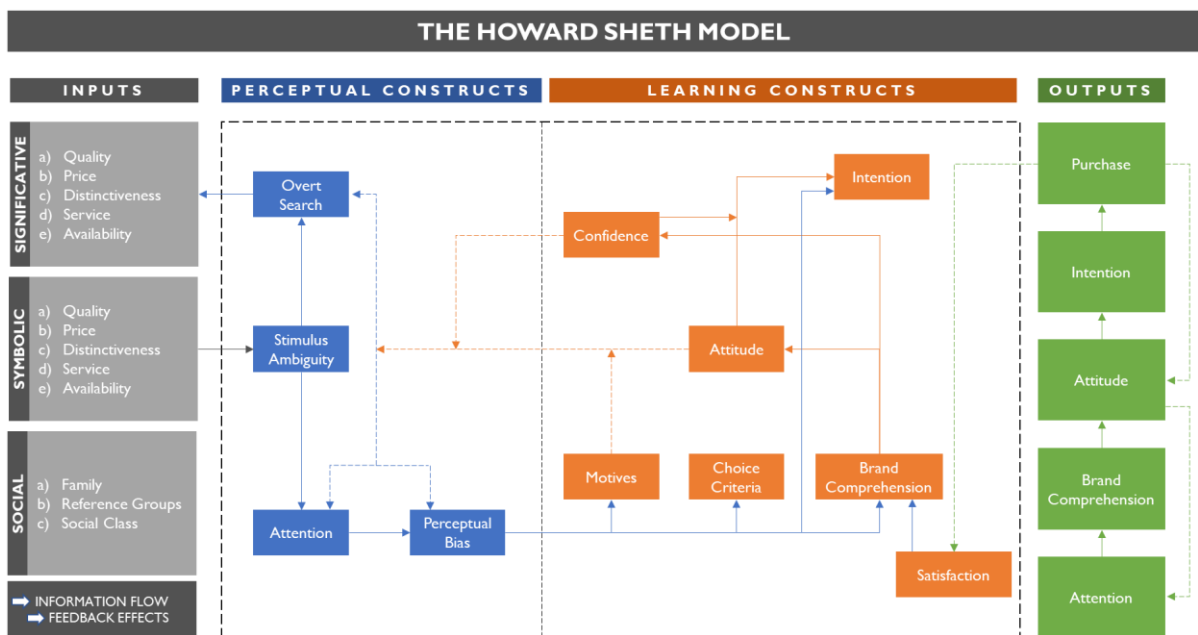
#### 4.4.2.3 Howard-Sheth Model

One of the earliest consumer decision - making models, commonly referred to as the Theory of Buyer Behaviour, was developed by Howard and Sheth (1969). In this model as depicted in Figure 4.4, Howard and Sheth (1969) as cited in Jisana (2014) attempted to create a model that helped explain the behaviour of both individual or domestic consumers as well as industrial buyers. The theory focuses on branding and brand choice but also includes wider related activities and thus it was termed the theory of buyer behaviour and not merely a theory of brand choice. The model has four main variables at its heart, namely, input variables, hypothetical theories, external variables and finally output variables (Goodhope, 2015). Both the variables input as well as output are studied as pertinent variables in that they can be directly derived from reality. The hypothetical constructs are inferred from variables that intervene in the buyer's mental state that result in a purchase.

Stimuli that exists around the environment of the buyer which relays information to consumers about the characteristics of the product is referred to as inputs. (E.g. good or bad quality, value or cost, availability, exclusivity) and consequently influence their corresponding purchasing decisions (Goodhope, 2013). Jisana (2014) mentions that the interaction of the learning and perceptual concepts includes the individual's motivations, selection criteria, brand conceptualization and conviction in the decision- making process. The author also added, that output (final purchase decision) is created as consumers react to

these variables. However, factors that are external consist of personality sets, financial image, culture, and perception of the significance of purchase causes either a direct or an indirect impact on a purchasing decision.

According to Rice (1997), this model is regarded as one of the more comprehensive models, emphasising the importance of stimulus inputs on consumer behaviour and providing the means for which a consumer places order to these inputs prior to making the decision final. However, there have been some criticisms of the Howard-Sheth model. For example, the model has a relative weakness in modelling choices made between different families of product (Rice, 1997), which implies that the model is more suitable for describing consumers' choices among brands rather than a decision-making process among unrelated alternatives. Thus, brand loyalty and repeat purchase behaviour can be explained by this model (Sheth and Parvatiyar, 1995), which is an important concept. Consequently, the Howard-Sheth model can explain and predict consumers' buying behaviour through consideration of the various inputs they have received.



**Figure 4.4: A simplified description of the theory of buyer behaviour**

Source: Adapted from Howard and Sheth (1968, p.30)

#### 4.4.2.4 Assael's model

Differences in a consumer's decision-making process are widely described by their level of decision making as well as the type of involvement. In terms of purchase involvement, a distinction between consumers whom have high and low levels of involvement, are common

when reviewing marketing literature. This helps in providing an insight of how consumers behave when faced with different purchasing decisions (MacDonald, Saliba and Bruwer, 2013). MacDonald *et al.* (2013) stated that consumers whom are considered highly involved are referred to as utilizing greater amounts of information as they are more interested in the attainment of greater knowledge, whereas low involved consumers are regarded as simplifying choices.

However, Khan and Islam (2017) do not agree that the level of consumer involvement in the various aspects of a consumers purchasing process can be regarded as the fundamental determinant of a consumers' behavior. Schiffmann, O'Cass, Paladino, D'Allessandro and Bednall (2011), state that the level of consumer involvement rather depends on the degree of relevance that the product has for that specific consumer. Therefore, purchases that induced higher levels of involvement were considered more important to consumers and evoked greater problem solving. In contrast, low involvement purchases are not considered as important to the consumer and resulted in less problem- solving commitment from the consumer due to the lack of perceived risk. Teare (1998), posited that lower levels of involvement were more likely when consumers possessed previous experience of that product. Woodside, Trappey and MacDonald (1997), also state that a consumer's prior experience regarding a product, lends itself to more confidence in its purchase as well as lower levels of perceived risk.

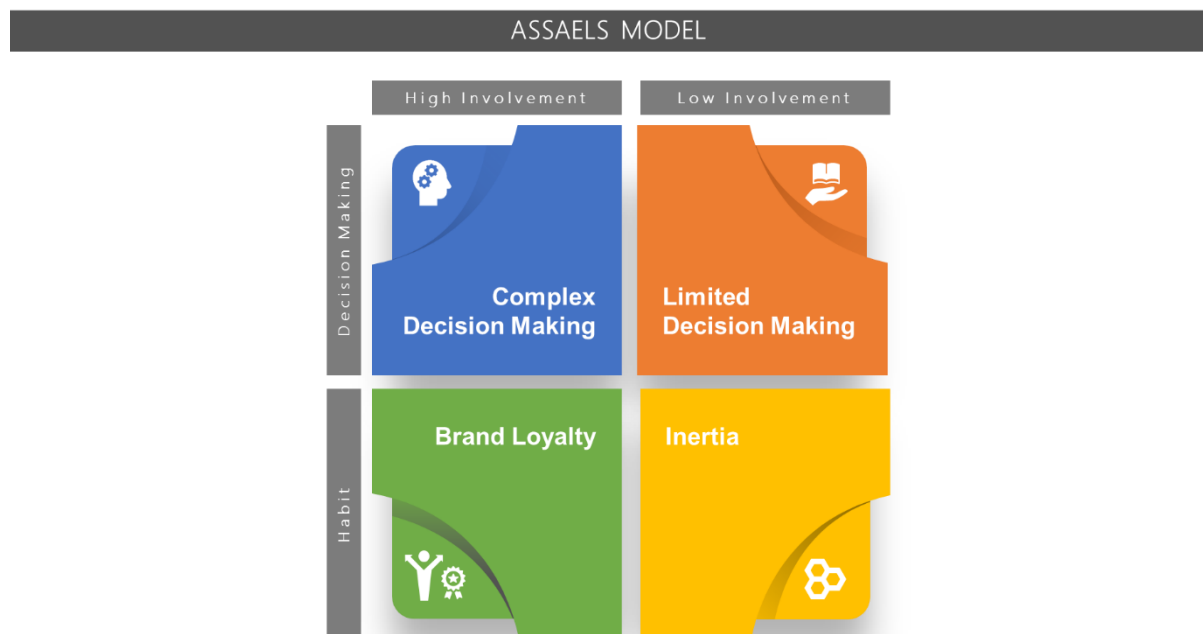
In terms of a range of effort connected to problem-solving, there are three detailed levels of consumer decision-making: extensive problem-solving, limited problem-solving, and routine response behavior (Schiffman and Kanuk, 2007). Firstly, the consumers at the extensive problem-solving level necessitate more information to build criteria to evaluate specific brands and a greater amount of knowledge regarding each of the brands they are considering. Sirakaya and Woodside (2005), suggest that most purchases of tourism services involve extensive problem-solving due largely to the intangible nature of goods and the relatively high costs, which are both monetary and non-monetary, such as spending a lot of time on the information searching process to find a favorable product/service. Secondly, the consumers at the level of limited problem-solving, have already, what for them, would consist of the basic or minimum criteria to be used in evaluation of a product as well as other brands in similar product categories. However, at this level, they still have not fully recognized their preferences regarding a collection of brands. Lastly, consumers at the

routine response behavior level have experience with the category and have established the criteria with which to evaluate the brands. All situations concerning consumer decisions cannot be complex and need extensive research; therefore, these specific levels of consumer decision-making have been posited.

In this context, Assael (1998) proposes another model describing a consumer's decision-making behaviour. The author argued that a consumer's buying choices are built on two elements: the scope of decision-making and the scale of participation in the purchase decision. Figure 4.5 presents a typology of a consumer's purchasing decisions. According to Assael's model, complex decision-making occurs in situations of widespread information processing, which requires a higher level of involvement on the part of the consumer regarding a product. When such a consumer reaches a final decision with a low degree of involvement, this decision-making process is called limited decision-making, in which limited information search and less comparison among brand alternatives takes place. However, realistically, these complex or limited decision-making processes do not always take place, especially when the consumer decides to purchase a brand. The consumer learns from experience that purchasing a brand with little decision-making is satisfactory (Assael, 1998).

When consumers have a strong devotion to a brand (brand loyalty), which is the result of repeated satisfaction and an emotional commitment to a brand, or consumers do not feel that it is necessary to search for an alternative (inertia), little information searching for brand alternatives is enacted (Cohen and Prayag, 2014). Inertia refers to the consumer repeatedly choosing the same brand because they do not feel that searching for an alternative is worth the effort. Therefore, this model shows the developed types of decision-making processes and the possibility that one decision-making model can explain various purchasing conditions. Furthermore, the meaning of brand loyalty and inertia is defined through Assael's model; this is important for consumer decision-making studies, since it is believed by marketers that customer loyalty is an expression of a commitment that is held by the customer repurchase a preferred product or service sometime in the future (Oliver, 2010). By examining Assael's model, further knowledge of consumer decision-making has been identified, as this model does not propose limited situations but relatively comprehensive consumer behavioral conditions.

Given the above, Assael’s buying decision behaviour model provided and explained that there are four categories of shoppers that fit into complex, limited, habitual and variety-seeking behaviours, and it is still valuable and helpful to understand why consumers behave differently in accordance with different products. Therefore, it is regarded by the current study that the model proposed by Assael can be useful for explaining how social media influences consumers’ involvement levels. Regarding a tourist’s decision- making, the type of holiday, engagement of activities and level of information sharing after a trip could be categorised as high or low involvement.



**Figure 4.5: Assael’s model of consumer buyer decision making**

**Source: Adopted from Assael (1998, p.67)**

#### **4.5 The Buying Decision Process**

The selection of a holiday destination and the planning of a trip is a considerably high risk and complicated decision- making process, this is largely due to the intangible nature of the service offering (Neuhofer, 2017). This process includes multiple phases and aspects. Travellers outlay large sums of money on a product that ultimately, they cannot physically see, and this causes them to be highly invested and involved in the decision-making process (Cohen and Prayag, 2014). In recent years, the advent of user generated content from social media content has become an important tool which travellers use in the attempt to reduce the risk associated with purchasing an intangible offering.

Many recent studies refer to five stages in the consumer decision-making process as illustrated in Figure 4.6: recognition of a need, the searching for information, the evaluating of alternatives, the purchase itself and finally the post purchase behaviour of the consumer.



**Figure 4.6: Buyer Decision Process**

**Source: Adapted from Kotler and Armstrong (2013, p. 153)**

#### **4.5.1 Need Recognition**

This is the first stage in the process and is triggered when a consumer has identified the existence of a need that exists. The recognition of a need to consume a product or service is activated by stimuli that could be external, internal or a combination of both, that send signals to the consumer creating the desire to consume a product or service (Sigala, 2012). In this way, we can conclude that the need recognition stage is a matter of receiving signals (Puccinelli, Goodstein, Grewal, Price, Raghubir and Stewart, 2009). It is when these signals are received by the consumer that they begin to think about the reasons why they might want to consume a product (Kim *et al.*, 2015). What is also important to understand is that consumer needs are also exposed to consumer factors such as social, cultural, personal and psychological (Rani, 2014).

According to Pan, McLaurin and Crofts (2007), social media has a high level of relevance to the need recognition of tourist consumers. Many tourists come to the realisation of their need to travel, through the various messages they receive on social media platforms, these messages provide the stimuli which create the motive to travel (Kiralova, 2014). When tourists post content on their personal experiences during their travel, such content triggers a need in the reviewers to visit these various destinations. Therefore, without social media, it is possible that some individuals may remain oblivious of their need to visit certain

destinations or their need to travel in general (Decrop and Kozak, 2014). Through the visual representations of other travellers' travel experience, social media also helps in engaging travellers that are aware of the need to travel but are not adequately motivated to embark on a holiday (Decrop and Kozak, 2014). Hence, we can say that social media is a powerful tool in arousing the need to travel in individuals.

#### **4.5.2 Information Search**

Once the consumer has recognised their need, they now attempt to find all necessary information about the product they would potentially purchase. This starts the next stage known as information search. According to Neuhofer (2017), it is more probable that consumers will rely on the information they gather through sources such as online media and word of mouth. However, what is in dispute is the quality of information which is largely dependent on the information channels ability to convey the required information as well as the actual ability of the consumer to identify the necessary information.

Cohen and Prayag (2014), further states that the process of making a purchase decision is one that is highly complicated. Consumers therefore need to be guided during each stage. The provision of such guidance should be made available through the channelling of information in ways that are suited to the characteristics of individual consumers, thus, ensuring that consumers can interpret knowledge attained in the best possible way, resulting in the formulation of a solution that meets consumer needs.

According to Law, Leung and Buhalis (2009), a thorough understanding of how travellers search information can help the industry to develop and optimise search engines that will better meet the information requirements of travellers. The internet is the most important source of information, this is more so when considering younger travellers.

Kang and Schuett (2013) state that the experiences transferred on social media platforms are viewed as important sources of information to travellers to the extent that such information can have an influential effect on the travel decisions of potential travellers. Travellers regard information from social media as unbiased and thus more accurate (Lopez and Sicilia, 2014). Tourists also require information from different sources to be sure that they are making the correct decision and feel confident. Social media platforms allow travellers to gather information from different sources in a timely manner and furthermore they can receive additional information at various stages of their travel.

### **4.5.3 Evaluation of Alternatives**

The consumer is exposed to a wide variety of alternatives when deciding the product that will most appropriately meet their needs. When determining which product to select, it is consumers themselves that set the requirements that will meet their minimum standards (Hu and Wei, 2013). Sparks and Browning (2011), state that there are some consumer characteristics that take preference when choosing a product that best fits the consumers' needs such as product pricing, brand knowledge and corresponding attributes. In a study by Creusen and Schoormans (2005) as cited in Salomon (2013), the authors found that the appearance of the product are also vitally important to consumers. The favourable evaluation of a product can be highly correlated to the perceptual as well as conceptual surrounding environment that allows for increased levels of product accessibility that results in a fast-tracked evaluation process. However, ultimately the consumer will rely most on self-assessment and the result is, products that do not always align fully to meet their needs.

Customer Research North America (2015), highlights that during the evaluation stage, interactions between customers through social media are now playing a larger role than ever before. Consumers reach out to marketers through the various social media platforms available to them such as Trip Adviser, Bookings.com and Facebook during this stage. Tourism companies find themselves in a position that qualifies them as the unrivalled experts on the quality of their products and brands. The ability to view online reviews of tourist attractions or even hotels themselves through social media platforms are said to play a critical role at this stage of a consumers' decision process.

According to Hudson and Thal (2013), in the tourism industry, the research gathered by travellers on social media is dominated by blogs and microblog websites. These are viewed as having the most influential role in reaching out to potential tourists at this stage. They provide the opportunity to express brand loyalty and can further allow for emotional connection between the brand and tourists.

### **4.5.4 Purchase Decision**

When the consumer reaches this stage, he has already evaluated all possible products with the knowledge possessed (Kotler and Armstrong, 2013). The consumer must now simply make the purchase. In doing so, all possible purchases are ranked, however this does not mean that the highest ranked product will be selected, this is due to situational factors that

may unexpectedly affect the purchase decision. The influence of people that are in the presence of the consumer could result in impulse purchases; this is more prevalent in the presence of peers rather than family (Jacobson and Munar, 2012). Furthermore, the existence of unexpected occurrences during the final purchase could impact the ultimate decision (Neuhof, 2017). The existence of sub purchase decisions such as time of purchase or promotions could affect a final decision.

According to Pick (2013), many consumers, especially those under the age of 35, are more likely to follow the recommendations of their peers when deciding on what travel products to choose. Law *et al.* (2009) similarly share the view that during this stage the purchase of many consumers occurs on social media itself, through platforms such as Bookings.com. Many tourism organisations now offer bookings through Facebook, resulting in increased tourism sales.

#### **4.5.5 Post-purchase Behaviour**

This is the final stage and involves events that occur after the consumer makes a purchase. In this stage a great amount of emphasis is placed on understanding the satisfaction levels experienced using the product purchased. An understanding of this stage is fundamental for companies to develop strategies to enhance any satisfaction gaps that may exist from customers in the usage and experience related to the product (Gohil, 2015). The more the products' utility and appearance meets the expectations of a consumer, the higher the levels of satisfaction that positively correlate to increased brand adoption (Hu and Wei, 2013).

Social media presents a beneficial avenue for tourists to evaluate their experience and communicate their feelings and opinions (Hu and Wei, 2013). On returning to their respective abodes, travellers very often are keen to exchange thoughts and share their travel experience. Hence, the information on social media shapes the viewers' perception and impression of a specific destination, as travellers take pleasure in revealing their holiday diaries on social media. (Pan *et al.*, 2007). Hays *et al.* (2013) contends that with the surge in social media popularity, travellers are gaining more supremacy as the authority of tourism companies decreases. No longer, do organizations and marketers within the travel and tourism industry have dominance and control over the image portrayed of their offerings or destination. Social media is a contemporary and perpetually developing phenomena which involves consumer created information shared on an online platform (Iblasi *et al.*, 2016)

In general, the process should be viewed as forward moving, which starts prior to a purchase and continues after the final purchase. The decision-making process starts from the recognition of a need or desire to travel. This is then followed by a multitude of decisions that must be made such as the time of travel, the mode of transport and accommodation type, to name a few. Hudson and Thal (2013), view the decision-making process as one that involved six stages, namely: awareness stage, information search, attitude development, evaluation, and purchase and post purchase behaviour. After the individual has determined the need for holiday, the next stage being information search can begin as described above. Once all the information has been gathered, the next stage is the evaluation of the information collected and comparing different attributes of information on products. The consumer forms preferences on destinations, based on the factors that affect our behaviour as individuals, such as personality, motivation, social groups and culture, as well as the very nature of the holiday. The search phase could also continue well into a holiday as travellers decide on what activities to take part in or places to eat. After the holiday, the traveller evaluates his trip which has a bearing on the first phase of his next trip.

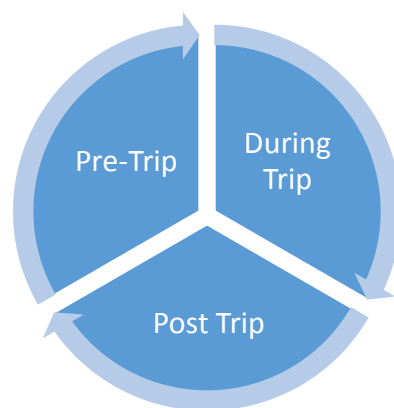
#### **4.6 Holiday travel as a process**

One of the very first studies to propose holiday travel as a process that consists of stages was conducted by Clawson and Knetsch (1966). They proposed that holiday travel was a process consisting of five stages, namely, planning, travel to site, experiences and activities on site, the return travel and lastly the reflection of the travel. Fridgen (1984), used Clawson and Knetsch's work and further applied it towards the tourism domain, suggesting that it provided a link between social processes, the environment and tourism behaviour. Hall (2005), was another that adopted the same framework, however in his work he described the first stage as decision making, showing that a tourists' decision to visit a location was included in this stage. However, in the work of Clawson and Knetch (1966), Fridgen (1984) and Hall (2005) it cannot be clearly determined as to when the first stage exactly starts.

The concept of a dreaming stage as part of the travel process began appearing in literature in the works of Pearo and Carroll (2011) and (Neuhofer, Buhalis and Ladkin, 2012). In these academic literatures, there is no clear definition as to what precisely the dreaming stage is, they merely postulate that it is the stage in which the consumer begins to search for information regarding travel. There is no indication as to when this stage begins or concludes.

Krippendorff (1986) as cited in Fotis *et al.* (2012), was the first to take a cyclical view of the travel process. In his work, he viewed tourism as an important part of the make-up of our social system. He further perceived this process of travel, as a cycle to demonstrate its repetitive nature. Krippendorff (1986) states “Still, the wish to leave again re-emerges quickly, for life cannot be resuscitated by means of few weeks of vacations and a few weekends” (Krippendorff, 1986, p. 524).

Bauer (2001); Maher, Steel, McIntosh, Ladkin (2003) and Manrai and Manrai (2011), adopt the works of Clawson and Knetch (1966) in their frameworks, however they limited the number of stages to just three being before the trip, during and after the trip. This more simplified version of the stage model of travel has also been adopted by MacKay and Vogt (2012) in investigating technology use in the vacation context as a continuation for trip planning. Given the nature of his study, this method will be used, as illustrated in Figure 4.7 below. The pre-trip stage will start when the tourist has a generic need to go on holiday and will ultimately end when the tourist departs for his holiday. The during-the-trip stage starts when the tourist starts his journey until he returns home. Finally, the post trip is when the holiday maker has returned home when his holiday ends.



**Figure 4.7: The holiday process**

**Source: Adapted from Manrai and Manria (2011, p. 24)**

#### **4.6.1 Pre-trip phase**

Leung *et al.*, (2013) made mention that the probability of travellers coming across social media content was more than one tenth of all search results. This shows the importance of social media in facilitating the travellers planning during the pre- trip stage. Howison *et al.*

(2014) also stated that the increase in social media popularity has generated the need for tourism operators to perceive and capitalise on this increased reliance.

However, Leung *et al.* (2013) argued that an important issue is the lack of direct experiences related to tourism products. This means that the perceived benefits of a tourism product cannot be accurately evaluated prior to the actual consumption. Tourism products are usually high priced and require high levels of involvement. Travellers therefore have an increased need to collect and interpret information at an early stage of their decision-making process, enabling the reduction of risk associated with making incorrect choices. The information needs of tourists can be met through a process of searching for content relating to their holiday on social media platforms, reducing the need to rely on relatives.

Thevenot (2007) cited by Leung *et al.* (2013) further stated that the perspectives and experiences of previous tourists through images, video and text could increase the level of collaboration during the pre-trip stage. This allows for social media to be used as a tool for accessing destination knowledge, although it could be argued that the reliability of information on social media platforms is low, resulting in lower levels of trust amongst users for travel information (Ibanez, Sebastia and Onainda, 2016).

#### **4.6.2 During the trip**

Howison *et al.* (2014) emphasised the importance and use of social media in providing unprecedented up to date information in diversified formats for tourists during their travel, at the same time stating that the ability to use Facebook as a communication tool was of utmost importance to tourists during their travel. The ability to check-in online for air travel or at holidays allow travellers to save time as well as ensure all travel arrangements are planned according to schedule.

Yoo and Gretzel (2011) stated that social media use during a holiday allows travellers to communicate with relatives and friends at home, keeping them informed as to their trip and allowing them to share in the holiday experiences virtually. Social media use during the trip has great influence on the purchase decisions of travellers during their holiday as they can view restaurants nearby and other activities that might not have been aware to them.

### **4.6.3 Post trip Phase**

According to Luliana *et al.* (2013) social media has the ability to influence a tourist's behaviour from the information stage and up until the post purchase stage. Travellers will make use of social media after their trip to display certain behavioural patterns such as dissatisfaction and statements regarding their holiday. This is further supported by Lorache *et al.* (2012), who posited that almost every customer can participate in generating and elevating online travel content.

Yoo and Gretzel (2011), stated that many academics found the urge to investigate the post trip phase of tourists' motives, evaluation and content creation. Howison *et al.* (2014), found that the two major factors in motivating travellers to create user generated content on social media were social interaction and the need to share experiences.

### **4.7 Conclusion**

From the studies and literature above, it is evident that from the way that tourists research prospective destinations, to the events that they participate in once arriving at their destinations, the new ways that consumers use social media to make purchasing decisions has influenced the holiday process from start to finish.

Tourism contributors will therefore have to involve holidaymakers with multichannel cohesive interactions and inspire them to invite dialogue about and recommend beneficial experiences. Engaging with tourists on real-time social media has enormous consequences for the travel industry. Tourists' present encounter with the innovative digital technology helps them expand services while making their online experiences more tailored and far more appropriate.

The use and impact of social media on consumer behavior during the holiday travel process outlined above will be amongst the contributions that will throw light on decisions about the collection and analyzing of data which will be discussed in detail in the next chapter on Research Methodology.

## **CHAPTER 5: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

### **5.1 Introduction**

Du Plooy-Cilliers, Davis, and Bezuidenhout (2014) stated that research is a means of investigation whereby information is collected. According to Du Plooy-Cilliers *et al.* (2014) proclaimed that information is obtained in various ways and the information that is gathered is also understood in numerous ways. According to Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill (2016), the type and method of data collected depended on the researcher's interpretation of the world; this is referred to as a philosophical view. Myers (2009), on the other hand, stated that research methodology is a strategic investigation and therefore founded on strategy and data compilation and not on assumptions. Welman, Kruger and Mitchell (2005) maintained that the research process involves acquiring knowledge that is systematical, precise and logical in nature and this is achieved by sourcing balanced methods and practices. Welman *et al.* (2005) suggested that there are different methods that research methodology employs to conduct research.

The most widely used types of research methods that are used and known are quantitative and qualitative research. Quantitative research is frequently built on collating and analyzing statistical data and it uses a large sample of respondents to gain a limited amount of data (Littlefield, 2013). To gather information regarding the opinions of the respondents, qualitative research uses semi or unstructured interviews and procedures that involve detailed observation, whilst the quantitative research method is a practical approach using a measured and precise method.

Both these methods are clarified and examined in more depth further on in this chapter. Hence, this chapter concentrated on the practice and strategy supporting the research process. Also, included in this chapter are the location of the research investigation; a description of the subject's profiles; the method in which data was gathered; data analysis; and the validity and reliability of the study.

### **5.2 Research paradigm**

The research paradigm is in reference to the manner of examining a social phenomenon in which the understandings of such phenomena can be gained and explained (Saunders *et al.*, 2016). In more simplistic terms, the researcher's personal philosophy on science will

influence the selection of the research paradigm which will guide the research (Ponterotto, 2002). It is necessary that when conducting research, the researcher holds a philosophical view that will be the underpinning to the study in conjunction with the methods chosen to form the research (Kivunja and Kuyini, 2017). The selection of a specific research philosophy cannot be said to be better than another, however it depends on the questions that the research attempts to answer. The researcher may decide to have different research approaches in the attempt to explore the reality by way of different views.

### **5.2.1 Ontology and epistemology**

Ontology is concerned with the nature of reality, while epistemology is the assumptions about knowledge. In this way, it refers to what the researcher considers acceptable knowledge in a field of study (Saunders *et al.*, 2016). According to Bryman and Bell (2007) social ontology is considered as a fundamental part of conducting business research, because it can fuel the studies research questions and have an influence in the choice of methodology. With regards to ontology there are two aspects; namely objectivism and subjectivism. Objectivism makes the emphasizes that social entities exist in a reality that is external to social actors, while subjectivism makes the claim that social phenomena are construed by the perceptions and actions based on such perception of social actors (Saunders *et al.*, 2016).

Regarding such discussion on objectivism and subjectivism, Smircich (1983) as cited in Kivunja and Kuyini (2017) gave an example that could prove useful in understanding the two viewpoints. Accordingly, Smircich (1983) as cited in Kivunja and Kuyini (2017) asserted that objectivists take the view that culture is something that exists in an organization, while on the other hand, a subjectivist will claim that this objectivist view is far too simplistic, as they would believe that culture is born from complex sequences of phenomena that include various social interactions. Epistemology can thus be viewed as the justification of what is considered acceptable knowledge in a field of study (Gray, 2004). There are numerous classifications that attempted to describe the way in which researchers studied reality such as positivism, critical realism, interpretivism, postmodernism and pragmatism.

Positivism is the philosophical stance of a natural scientist and comprises working with observable social reality that attempted to produce law like generalisations. Positivists view organisations as real in a similar manner as which physical objects are real. It is commonly regarded by positivists that phenomena that can be observable will produce data that is

credible. Therefore, data that positivists collect should have the potential to be measured (Holborn, Burrage and Langley, 2009). It could also be said that the research of positivists is more structured in methodology, having made use of statistics, large sample surveys and modelling to assist in replication (Gill and Johnson, 2002; Simons, 2009).

In contrast to positivism, interpretivism is seen as critical for those researchers that aim to understand the differences that exist between humans in their roles as social actors. The emphasis is placed on the discerning differences in conducting research among people. The argument lies in that, the world of business as we know it, is too complex to be treated in a similar manner as physical sciences (Johnson, Buehring, Cassell and Symon, 2006). The interpretivism paradigm makes the further argument that deep insights can be lost if the complexity of the social world was reduced in the attempt to create law like generalisations, such as that produced by positivists.

Accordingly, the interpretivist philosophical paradigm enables the researcher to interpret the actions and interactions of people with others, generating meanings that can result in the modification of the researchers own meanings (Altinay and Paraskevas, 2008). Due to findings based on interpretivism being more related to real social settings, interpretivist use methods that tend to be qualitative in nature such as in-depth interviews, grounded theory or ethnography for the collection of data (Simons, 2009). The different assumptions regarding positivism and interpretivism are highlighted in Table 5.1.

The selection of a research philosophy is traditionally dominated by the choice of positivism or interpretivism. However, according to Tashakkori and Teddlie (2003), the selection of a philosophical paradigm as a continuum is more beneficial rather than taking the view that they are two extremes. In this light, pragmatists argue that selecting between one position and another is to an extent unrealistic when put to practice. Pragmatism takes the position that it is possible to work with variations of epistemology, ontology and even axiology, thus meaning that a mixed method approach be adopted encompassing both quantitative and qualitative methods within a study. The pragmatist makes the argument that the most imperative determinant of the research paradigm is that the research be based on the research question (Saunders *et al.*, 2016). In this view different philosophical paradigms may be required in accordance with each specific research question. Hence, the fundamental view of pragmatism is to make use of what would be considered to work best (Denscombe, 2007).

When taking a pragmatic view, it can be said that knowledge deemed acceptable is judged by how well it can be made applicable to a problem (Denscombe, 2007). Pragmatism views knowledge as being based and construed on the reality of the world (Teddlie and Tashakkori, 2009). Creswell further commented that pragmatism is based on a range of choices that are seen suitable for its purpose, although fundamentally it does not commit itself to any one position. In opposition to pragmatism, some researchers viewed the use of pragmatism as untenable as they regard it as combining different world views (Smith and Heshusius, 1986; Sale, Lohfeld and Brazil, 2002). Pragmatism is a philosophical position that is intuitively appealing, as it avoids the debate as to what is truth and reality.

Based upon such discussion, interpretivism was appropriate in the context of this study due largely to the nature of this research. This study aimed to explore how social media influences the traveller's consumption behaviour within the travel process. The researcher believed that deeper insight and meanings could be determined directly from interviewees pertaining to what this study aims to explore. The study attempted to understand and interpret social life by deeply investigating, instead of formulating and testing a hypothesis. In further substantiating the choice of interpretivism, the researcher deemed to understand human related research question to be more aligned to this study by an interpretivism view. Table 5.1 on the following page, illustrates the differences between positivism and interpretivism.

**Table 5.1: Positivism vs Interpretivism**

	Positivism	Interpretivism
Research Purpose	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Discovering the law of social life</li><li>• Explaining social life</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Interpreting social life</li><li>• Understanding social life</li></ul>
Research method	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Mostly quantitative method</li><li>• Formulating hypotheses and testing them</li><li>• Focusing on data and facts</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Qualitative method</li><li>• In-depth investigations</li><li>• Developing ideas through induction</li></ul>
Sampling	Large numbers of informants	Small numbers of informants and investigating in depth
Design	Highly structured	Flexible
Advantages	Undertaking a research in a value-free way	Gaining rich insights into a complex world
Disadvantages	Complete freedom from the inclusion of a researcher's value is impossible	Researcher has to adopt an empathetic stance

**Source: Adapted from Johnson *et al.* (2006); Altinay and Paraskevas (2008); Holborn *et al.* (2009); Simons (2009) and Saunders *et al.* (2016)**

### **5.3 Qualitative and quantitative approach**

In general, there are two kinds of research paradigms in the sphere of social science namely: qualitative and quantitative paradigms. Although the advantages and disadvantages of these two paradigms have been a contentious issue among researchers, this study will provide

clarity and an explanation of such advantages and disadvantages. The qualitative research process gathers, understands and examines information by scrutinizing the behaviour of individuals through the way in which they communicate and behave (Anderson, 2006).

The quantitative research study includes statistics and measures specific objectives. On the other hand, the qualitative study is more evocative and examines ideas, connotations and definitions. A more subjective quality is replicated in the qualitative study as compared to a quantitative study as it uses different methods of data collection. In describing qualitative research, Welman *et al.* (2005) states that scholastically, it is more a method rather than a set of techniques or strategy, while Patton (2002) proposed that qualitative research is categorised by its objectives, which in turn relates to understanding certain elements of social life.

The procedure frequently creates the use of words as data for analysis, instead of numbers. A “socially constructed nature of reality” (Denzin and Lincoln, 2007, p. 17) is highlighted in the qualitative paradigm. Hence, qualitative researchers are convinced that the world consists of numerous dynamic realities that are dependent on context. Consequently, quantitative researchers believe that information is only understood through the descriptions of context by participants and their understanding of reality (Patton, 2002). Qualitative researchers conduct studies to observe the manner in which social knowledge is shaped and given context and connotation (Denzin and Lincoln, 2007).

The qualitative research paradigm also poses limitations to its application. For example, the data gathered by a qualitative research approach cannot be quantified and applied to the results of the entire population.

The quantitative research paradigm, on the other hand, understands that the perception of the world is shaped from realities that are objectively measured (Cohen and Manion, 1980). The quantitative research model highlights the contributing relationships of variables and emphasis is placed on the dimension of variables in terms of extent, quantity, strength, or occurrence (Creswell, 2014). Hence, quantitative researchers accept an objectively measured interpretation of reality, instead of a reality that is subjectively interpreted, so they are inclined to use structured survey instruments when gathering data.

Hence, in view of the above features, the nature of qualitative research is more variable and less rigid in comparison to the quantitative approach. Hence, applying a qualitative approach is advantageous, in that the data collated can offer enlightened and meaningful material in regard to emotions and reasoning, and ways in which the decision process is formulated; furthermore, principles and attitudes are attained, which cannot be acquired by using a quantitative method.

Patton (2002) explained that the qualitative method seeks to gain an insight into the participant's experiences and attitudes. Hence, this method attempts to offer an answer on why, what or how of an incident, rather than quantifying 'how many' or 'how much' which is encompassed in a quantitative method. A qualitative study would then be suitable, if insight into a situation is required. Anderson (2006) suggested that qualitative data is analysed to determine trends which shows non-conformities over a selected period or to illustrate the relationship between specific variables. Creswell (2014) stated that the main advantage of qualitative research is its flexibility, as open-ended questions are generally used. This therefore, permits participants to express themselves freely while providing an in-depth insight of the subject matter.

To sum up, four main differences exist between qualitative and quantitative methodologies. Firstly, the understanding of the research project is different. Qualitative researchers possess an inductive view, the researcher endeavors to analyze data and to propose theories from such data, to gain a deeper comprehension regarding human behavior (Saunders *et al.*, 2016). Furthermore, they are of the belief that human beings are influenced by features of their environment, such as locations and events.

In contrast to qualitative researchers, quantitative researchers hold a deductive view: a researcher utilizes available literature to help recognize theories and philosophies that he or she may examine using data (Saunders *et al.*, 2016). Hence, quantitative researchers who hold a deductive approach tend to exclude researchers themselves from their subjects, to formulate hypotheses based on prevailing theories and choose whether such hypotheses be supported or rejected.

Secondly, qualitative research is more flexible in the way the research progresses; in other words, the course of research can be dynamic. Thus, questions that need to be changed in accordance to the researcher can be done or altered to make the interview process more

accommodating, the order of interviews or questions can be changed. Nevertheless, quantitative researchers cannot easily alter the format of questionnaires they utilize, since questionnaires already have a structure.

Thirdly, in order to draw conclusions or to test hypotheses, the quantitative approach to research requires statistical scrutiny, which depends on a numerical type of data, while the qualitative approach, on the other hand, is generally not concerned with figures or outcomes in the way of numerical data (Denzin and Lincoln, 2007), because the findings can be stated using words (Saunders *et al.*, 2016).

Lastly, the generalization of research results among two research approaches is dissimilar. The results gained through a quantitative approach can be simply generalized; however, generalization of the results from qualitative research may be unsuitable. The different features of quantitative and qualitative research are described in Table 5.2.

After careful consideration of the advantages and disadvantages of both these methods, this study utilized the qualitative research approach since the current literature pertaining to the focus of this study was restricted in its capacity to offer understanding and investigation of the issues and variables influencing the use of social media in tourist consumer behaviour within the holiday travel process. Qualitative research was acknowledged as a good choice that permitted a thorough exploration of the role that emotional intelligence played, in the service industry, thus beneficial perceptions, response and insights were gathered.

Furthermore, a small sample was required to gather data through research questions that are less structured. Also, this study aimed not to just authenticate facts but attempted to appreciate social phenomena, which suggested that for this study, the qualitative research approach was more suitable. Table 5.2, on the page that follows, highlights the features of quantitative and qualitative research.

**Table 5.2: Features of quantitative and qualitative research**

Feature	Quantitative Research	Qualitative Research
Basic characteristic	- Objective - Hard and fixed	- Subjective - Soft and flexible
Type of research questions	- More structured	- Less structured - Open-ended, semi-structured
The view about research project	- More formalised - Deductive	- Relies on interpretation - Inductive
Epistemological orientation	- Natural science model - Positivism	- Interpretivism
Research goals	- Validating facts	- Understanding social life - Discovering new ideas
Sampling	- Large samples -Representation of target group	- Small samples - Limited to the respondents of samples
Generalisability of research results	- Very good	- Very limited
Advantages	- Allowing the anticipation of phenomena is possible	- Less concern with the need to generalise
Disadvantages	- Sufficient size of samples is needed to generalise	- Findings from small size of samples can be criticised as subjective

**Source: Adapted from Cohen and Manion (1980); Creswell (1994); Denzin and Lincoln (2007) and Saunders *et al.* (2016)**

#### **5.4 Types of Research Purpose**

Research purpose falls into three main groups: explanatory, exploratory and descriptive. Nevertheless, this grouping does not necessarily suggest that the questions of the researcher should be related to any one of these research purposes. Hence, the researcher's questions could be both explanatory and descriptive and as such the research plan would have more than one purpose (Saunders *et al.*, 2016).

To start, the characteristics of each research purpose will be explained; then the study will provide an explanation of the type of research purpose this study adopted. With a research purpose, an investigative study focusses on the current trends in the social world and evaluating phenomena in a new and innovative light (Robson, 2002). The possibility of using an exploratory study is huge, especially when not much about the issues are known. Alternatively, it is also highly probable to use an exploratory study when researchers can get only minimum information about a research topic.

Exploratory studies can be very useful for researchers who wish to explain the comprehension of a problem, especially when researchers themselves are not certain about the precise components of the problem (Saunders *et al.*, 2016). Since research that uses an exploratory study is adjustable to change, researchers conducting exploratory research are able alter the course of the study in accordance to the outcomes of different data and new perceptions (Saunders *et al.*, 2016). When little is known about the research problem, it becomes necessary to expand on the research area, the exploratory research can be used.

In view of these characteristics of exploratory studies, accurate and appropriate research methods should be contemplated. For example, to achieve a profound and comprehensive understanding of what is going on, studies can be done by interviewing individuals and focus groups. Hence, a satisfactory grasp of the phenomenon can be achieved by interviewing individuals first; thereafter, it would be useful to interview many focus groups by deliberating on the concerns found in earlier interviews. Consequently, the conclusions attained through these research methods can offer important introductory material later (Sekaran and Bougie, 2013). To sum up, it is important to conduct exploratory studies when obtaining a clear understanding about a phenomenon and especially when the researchers requires prior knowledge.

On the other hand, the goal of descriptive research is to exemplify a precise profile of participants, circumstances or events. (Robson, 2002). A researcher namely searches for a clear portrayal of how this is used in social phenomena. When there is a necessity to clarify the characteristics of a group of individuals, and furthermore to calculate how often a specific situation occurs, descriptive research is used by gaining an insight into certain products and facilities. Structured interviews, surveys and questionnaires are suitable research methods used to gather data for descriptive research purposes, since explaining variables is a numerically linked format.

Explanatory study also aims to explain and clarify the characteristics of the research variable and is therefore not different when compared to descriptive research. Nevertheless, it seeks to explain the fundamental relationship that exists amongst variables, which suggests that an explanatory resolve can be used from a context completely different from a descriptive study (Saunders *et al.*, 2016). On the other hand, qualitative data descriptions and statistical tests and can be employed for explanatory purposes.

*“The nature of the study – whether it is exploratory, descriptive, or hypothesis testing- depends on the stage to which knowledge about the research topic has advanced.”* (Sekaran and Bougie, 2013, p 96).

As suggested above, the extent of the growth of knowledge will determine the decision with regards to the choice of a suitable purpose of the study. This therefore implies that depending on whether the research has been developed and produced by past researchers or not, the purpose of the study can be different. This study aimed to examine the role of social media in influencing tourist consumer behaviour within the holiday travel process. Previous researchers have not done much research on this, although there are several previous studies which has not been much researched by previous researchers, although there have been a numerous previous study concentrating on how consumers arrive at travel-related decisions; therefore, this topic is still at the initial stages of research. Hence, this study is exploratory in nature, investigating the objective of clients who select holiday destinations using social media, the features of social media, clients and the tourism industry.

## **5.5 Sampling**

Sampling assists the researcher in reducing the amount of data that needs to be collected (Sekaran and Bougie, 2013, Saunders *et al.*, 2016). A sample can be described as the subset of a population that is a representation of a larger population (Creswell, 2014). It is considered impractical for the researcher to study the entire population and thus the need for a sample is required (Saunders *et al.*, 2016). Dealing with qualitative research, it has been suggested that the sample size is not the main problem (Lyons and Coyle, 2007), but rather it is of more importance that the sample that has been selected can inform the research questions (Mason, 2002). This view is further supported by Oppong (2013), stating that sampling should entail the selection of those participants whom will provide the most relevant findings to the research objectives.

The sampling techniques available to the researcher can be divided into two sections: probability or non-probability sampling (Creswell, 2014). Probability sampling can assist the researcher in answering research questions as well as achieving the research objectives that require the statistical estimation regarding characteristics of the population from a sample. In this regard probability sampling is used in greater abundance with survey research strategies (Saunders *et al.*, 2016).

In comparison, non-probability sampling provides alternative techniques for selection of samples that are based on the subjective judgement of the researcher. The use of non-probability sampling can help the researcher in answering questions or addressing objectives that do not require the researcher making statistical inferences regarding the population. Non-probability sampling as a technique is less concerned with generalizability than that of probability sampling. Consequently, non-probability sampling techniques are regarded as more appropriate for conducting qualitative research.

According to Patton (2002), the sample size is also dependent on both the research question and objectives. Regarding the issue on sample size, many research textbooks recommend that data should be collected until a point of saturation is attained. According to Saunders *et al.* (2016), a sample size of between 5 and 25 is deemed as minimum for semi structured interviews. Guest, Bunce and Johnson (2006) state that for research that aims to understand the commonalities of a homogenous group, 12 in-depth interviews should be sufficient. However, it should be noted that 12 interviews would not be suitable when the population is heterogeneous (Guest *et al.*, 2006). Creswell (2009), stated that for a general study the researcher should consider the possibility of undertaking between 5 and 30 interviews. After a decision on the sample size has been made, the researcher should then select the sampling technique that is viewed as most appropriate.

### **5.5.1 Sampling technique**

Kumar (2014), proposed six sampling designs that can be observed in non-probability sampling these are: quota, accidental, convenience, purposive, expert and snowball sampling. Such sampling methods are utilised when elements are unfamiliar and when elements cannot be identified individually. Under these methods, the probability of each case being selected from the population is unknown. However, for research of an exploratory nature non-probability sampling is seen as the most practical sampling method.

Purposive sampling is a type of non-probability sampling in which the researcher uses judgement to select the participants that will make up the sample (Neuman, 2005). Oppong (2013) referred to purposive sampling as one of the most commonly used methods of sampling in qualitative research. This technique of sampling allows the researcher to select the participants that he feels possesses the requisite knowledge and experience that will be required to support the objectives of the study. Saunders *et al.* (2016) mentioned that purposive sampling is frequently used in qualitative sampling as it ensures that participants are targeted to yield the objectives of the study. Palys and Atchison (2008) stated that when a researcher has made the decision to engage in purposive sampling, it is an indication that the researcher sees this sampling as the strategic choices as to who, why and how the research will be conducted.

In light of the discussion above, this study used non-probability purposive sampling. Guests staying at N'taba River Lodge were given the opportunity to participate in the interviews. From such guests, 12 guests were purposively selected with regards to their social media utilisation for holiday travel purposes. Participants were purposively selected to provide a greater depth of knowledge through relating the experiences that they have had with using social media during the various stages of their holiday.

## **5.6 Interviews**

The means of collecting data for this study was by way of interviews. The researcher considered this as the best means of gaining an in-depth understanding of the feelings and perceptions of participants. Due to the interview process being simplified through management of N'taba River Lodge, there were no costs involved. Interview questions were in the form of semi-structured open-ended questions that allowed for the researcher to engage in discussions with participants in the attempt to gain details that were deemed to be relevant to the study. Hancock *et al.* (2007), stated that the research questions used in a study are of utmost importance as they assist in guiding the entire research process. Furthermore, it was highlighted that with regards to qualitative studies, research begins with a general area of inquiry (Hancock *et al.*, 2007).

The participants were asked questions in a manner that permitted them to openly and actively express their opinions, feelings and attitudes as to the role that social media played in their holiday travel. Hancock *et al.* (2007) posited that questions in a study of a qualitative study

differ from those of a quantitative study, in that they do not have predictions. However, it should be noted that in both quantitative and qualitative studies there needs to be a link that binds the method with the research questions. As a qualitative study develops, it is considered necessary to refine and reformulate research questions this contrasts with (Hancock *et al.*, 2007).

According to Moriarty (2011), interviews are the common means of collecting data in studies that are qualitative in nature. This is due to the fact that it provides the agility in drawing on the experiences and feelings of people. Large amounts of data can be collected when conducting interviews and a considerable amount of time can be taken in setting up an interview. With regards to qualitative studies, interviews are commonly described as being either semi structured or in-depth; interviews are conducted using open ended questions that the researcher believes will assist in adding relevance to the research topic. Denscombe (2007) mentioned that research that takes a qualitative stance use interviews as a beneficial tool in finding the pulse of participants.

Interviews have traditionally been the best tool for the collection of data in qualitative studies (Remenyi, 2012). Fontana and Frey (2014), also shared the opinion that interviews are a reliable method for data collection in that it provides an accurate record of participants' perspectives. The researcher refrained from leading participants in giving information that was felt needed for the research, and rather allowed participants to freely express their opinions and experiences. Essential to the interview process is that the researcher has a deep understanding on the topic that is being discussed and possessed the requisite knowledge to enable the asking of questions that will benefit the study. If there was uncertainty on the part of the researcher during the interview process, the result would be a lack of probing questions that attempt to delve deep into the experiences of participants and ultimately lead in data that is of a lesser quality (Fontana and Frey, 2014).

Upon obtaining ethical clearance (Appendix 4), the researcher proceeded with the semi structured interviews in the month of October 2018. The researcher clarified with each participant prior to the commencement of the interview, that all information provided by them will remain confidential and be used only for reasons relating to this study. Participants were also made aware, prior to the interview, that their responses should be based on their unique perception and feelings. The researcher further clarified with all participants that their responses were an expression of their experiences and thus there are no correct or incorrect

answers. Participants were then given a consent form (Appendix 2), that was explained to them and acknowledged that the interview would be recorded and at a later date transcribed. Participants were also made aware of their right to withdraw from the study without any recourse or repercussion. In total 12 interviews were conducted, which provided a substantial amount of data which was used by the researcher to analyse and draw conclusions from. Table 5.3 lists the details of interview participants.

Respondent	Gender	Age	Nationality
R1	Female	38	South African
R2	Male	38	South African
R3	Female	58	German
R4	Male	61	German
R5	Male	65	South African
R6	Male	67	South African
R7	Male	62	South African
R8	Male	66	Dutch
R9	Female	55	South African
R10	Male	33	South African
R11	Female	31	South African
R12	Female	56	South African

**Table 5.3: List of respondents**

**Source: Constructed by the researcher**

### **5.7 Data analysis**

In qualitative research, a researcher may utilize several methods of analysing data. Such methods include analysis of template, analysis of content, discourse analysis, analysis of narrative and analysis of thematic and grounded theory. Template analysis combines an inductive approach with a deductive approach based on the principle of developing a theory once the data has been gathered by means qualitative analysis (Saunders *et al.*, 2009). While collecting and analysing data, codes can be formulated, modified or added accordingly (Saunders *et al.*, 2016).

Template analysis allows the researcher to examine and depict data in a shared format, to indicate similarities and differences (Remenyi, 2012). Content analysis on the other hand, can be characterized as a qualitative research method often adopted to understand the subject matter of text data which is conducted through a methodical classification procedure which involves the identification of themes and coding (Krippendorff, 2004; Hsieh and Shannon, 2005). Researchers consent to the data to determine the categories and codes, when analysis of content is implemented, instead of beginning with a theoretically based perceptions regarding what class of codes will be detected (Hsieh and Shannon, 2005). Discourse analysis is another analysis approach that a researcher may implement. Discourse analysis involves numerous approaches to the analysis of language in its own merit. Using discourse analysis, a researcher can specifically investigate the way language in the context of speech and written text, both creates and/or imitates and modifies the social world instead of using it to understand the social world as a phenomenon (Phillips and Hardy, 2002).

On the other hand, narrative analysis is often used to discover relationships, associations and descriptions that are socially formulated and have happened within narrative accounts. Grounded theory can be a suitable technique to use for a study, especially when it is necessary to create a theory from data gathered. Grounded study is regarded as a process of constant comparative analysis; therefore, when analysing data by means of grounded theory, researchers should repeatedly refer to the sources of their data to determine original meanings from participants and to thereby ratify their preliminary interpretation (Charmaz, 2006). Furthermore, thematic analysis is considered a flexible approach that can be independent of epistemology and philosophy. In other words, thematic analysis can be utilised irrespective of the scope of academic and epistemological approaches (Braun and Clarke, 2006).

It is therefore essential that in choosing a data analysis method that the method is compatible with “what the researcher wants to discover” (Braun and Clarke, 2006, p.80). Therefore, this study’s objectives and goals aligned with the method employed in this current study. Since this study aimed to determine the role of social media in influencing tourist consumer behaviour within the holiday travel process, observing this phenomenon through the respondent’s feedback and experiences played a vital role in this study. This study focused on the respondent’s experiences and their personal expressions during the interview process, providing reasons why consumers adopt social media within the holiday travel process

(Stafford, Stafford and Schkade, 2004). Hence, thematic analysis was considered as a more suitable method for the current research instead of using grounded theory approach.

To assist researchers in the concluding phases of analysis, coding is a measure that is used more accurately; coding enables interpretive process whereby themes, theories and models are developed. Although there are many coding methods, thematic analysis is considered as a method for detecting, observing, and reporting themes contained in the data (Braun and Clarke, 2006). It has the potential to marginally organize and define the data collected in detail. Thematic analysis also functions broader than this, by interpreting wide characteristics of the research topic (Boyatzis, 1998). Hence, thematic coding was implemented for this study, since achieving the objectives of this qualitative analysis hinges on the clarification of collated data material and on the various thoughts and opinions provided by the participants.

## **5.8 Ethics**

In research, issues surrounding ethics are crucial, this is more so when the research involves people. It is advised that all research must follow procedures that allow for adherence with ethical principles (Saunders *et al.*, 2016). Participants should be made to volunteer for participation in the study and furthermore they should be allowed to withdraw at any time, if they feel the need to without any discourse (Sekaran and Bougie, 2013). The researcher must take precautions to ensure that respondents are not harmed in any way as a result to their participation, the researcher is responsible for determining if the research can cause any harm to respondents either emotionally, physically or socially. Research should also be beneficial to respondents as well as to other researchers and society. (Durrheim and Wassenaar, 2004).

The researcher carefully considered all the ethical measures that needed to be taken, furthermore the study only commenced once ethical clearance had been gained Appendix 4. A gatekeeper's letter was obtained from N'taba River Lodge. All participants were made aware of their option to withdraw from the study if they felt necessary, participants were also given an informed consent form (Appendix 1), that they were required to sign. The consent form explained the nature of the study and also highlighted the fact that their participation was voluntary, and all responses would be tape recorded.

Creswell (2014) states that the researcher must assure respondents as to the confidentiality of the information they provide. Thus, the study does not make mention of names of participants in data presentation and analysis.

### **5.9 The quality of the research**

To date, there are continuing discussions among researchers as to whether phrases such as reliability and validity are applicable to evaluate qualitative research. Many researchers believe that the criteria and processes used to determine the reliability and validity of quantitative research is not applicable to qualitative research (Noble and Smith, 2015). There is a distinct difference between quantitative and qualitative researchers: on one hand, quantitative researchers use statistical methods to determine the validity and reliability of their research conclusions, while qualitative researchers, on the other hand, thoroughly describe the research design and context as well as the methods adopted in the study so as to increase the level of credibility for emerging studies of a similar context to employ (Creswell, 2014; Saunders *et al.*, 2016).

It is imperative that the techniques used to collect and analyse data offer consistent findings (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe and Jackson, 2012). Apprehensions regarding credibility occurs when there is the absence of standardization in such interviews. To eliminate these concerns and strengthen certainty, the research had to be dependable with the knowledge that, if it were conducted by other researchers, similar results would be found (Yin, 2009). It was seen as helpful to make and collect notes with regards to the research design, the explanations that support the approach that was chosen, methods and the information gained through the study, which in turn will be discussed by other researchers who are intent in reanalyzing the data collected by the researcher. (Saunders *et al.*, 2016).

Whether the findings of the research are truly what they appear to be, is a concern for all research (Saunders *et al.*, 2016). Tests that determine if what the researcher believes he is studying, is in fact being studied, are considered as internal to a study (Remenyi, 2012). Tests that consider the level of transferability of the study to others, in other settings and their transferability thereof are considered external to the study (Noble and Smith, 2015). In other words, addressing issues surrounding the level of generalization of the study's findings from the context of a qualitative research approach, qualitative researchers should design

and incorporate strategies that will ensure the increase in level of trustworthiness of findings (Noble and Smith, 2015).

In this study all interview participants were asked the same questions, the researcher also utilized an audio recorder to ensure the accuracy of transcriptions. The researcher took down notes on key themes that emerged from interviews that would be further investigated during the analysis of transcriptions, this insured that key information was not missed. Furthermore, interview questions were explained in detail to all participants to prevent any misunderstandings, as well as to ensure participants had an equivalent understanding of all questions. A meticulous record keeping, allowed for the emergence of a clear decision trail as well as ensuring that data interpretations were consistent and transparent.

### **5.10. Conclusion**

This chapter outlined the research methods, approaches, design and procedures. Research methodology was the focus of this chapter. To validate the course of the research study, data collection and analysis of data were highlighted. The qualitative research approach was applied, and interviews were carried out to gather data. During the interview process, the one-on-one interface with the respondents allowed the researcher to understand and appreciate the respondents' knowledge and emotions. Creswell (2014) suggests that this process helps to grasp the profound lessons entrenched in the data. The next chapter outlines the results and discussion and highlights the data collected from the interviews, through the method of thematic analysis.

## **CHAPTER 6: FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**

### **6.1 Introduction**

The analysis of findings presented in this chapter sought to reveal the influence of social media on tourist's consumer behaviour in context to the holiday travel process. Through the reviewing of literature, it was shown that the vast majority of studies that revolved around tourism and social media focused on the issues that surrounded a generic holiday decision. Such approach was deemed to be limiting. Hence, the findings in this chapter indicates the perceptions, attitudes as well as the success and failures of social media in influencing tourist consumption behaviour during their travel process. In doing so, the chapter begins by introducing the themes and sub themes that emerged from data collected during interviews. The chapter continues by delving deeper into each theme through discussion of participants responses comparing and contrasting this to literature reviewed.

### **6.2 Study themes and sub-themes**

This study utilised thematic analysis. All interviews were audio recorded and subsequently transcribed. This allowed for the emergence of themes (Table 6.1). Data collected from semi structured interviews, revealed that active users of social media incorporate social media in to their daily activities or routines; they receive information passively as well as actively when searching information regarding holiday trip stimuli. Exposure to holiday related stimuli was shown to impact a user's behaviour in creating inspiration for future travel, developing the need for a holiday as well as generating actual user interaction such as feedback through writing a comment or actively searching a destination.

During the holiday social media use was lower than that of before the trip. On analysis, it was revealed that participants used social media during their trip as communication tools that kept them in touch with their social media contacts, also as the platforms that would allow the provision of inputs as well as outputs to their holiday decisions and lastly as a platform to self-express. The semi structured interviews also revealed that participants make use of social media after their trip for two main reasons: first as platforms that allow for the post consumption evaluation of choices made during their holiday; second as platforms that enable travellers to self-express. Table 6.1 depicts the themes and sub-themes.

**Table 6.1: Summary of themes and sub-themes**

<b>THEMES</b>	<b>SUB - THEMES</b>
<b>Social media before the trip</b>	<b>Social media as a source of inspiration</b>
	<b>Friends and family as inspirational sources of travel motivation</b>
	<b>Social media as a source for inputs to decision making</b>
	<b>Development of desire to travel</b>
	<b>Action</b>
	<b>Pre – Trip self-expression</b>
<b>Social media during the trip</b>	<b>Source for providing inputs to holiday decisions</b>
	<b>Source for providing output to holiday decisions</b>
	<b>Attitude to the internet during the holiday</b>
	<b>Social media as a means of communication during the holiday</b>
	<b>Self – Expression during the trip</b>
<b>Social media post trip</b>	<b>Post consumption evaluation</b>
	<b>Post trip self-expression</b>
<b>Tourism marketing and social media</b>	<b>Travel brands presence on social media</b>
	<b>Trust</b>
	<b>Maintaining relationships with travellers on social media</b>

**Source: Constructed by the researcher**

## 6.2 Social media before the trip

### 6.2.1 Social Media as a source of inspiration

Respondents highlighted that they incorporate social media in to their daily activities or routines; they receive information passively as well as actively search information regarding holiday trip stimuli. Exposure to holiday travel stimuli can be shown to impact a user's behaviour in creating inspiration for future travel, developing the need for a holiday as well as generating actual user interaction such as feedback through writing a comment or actively searching a destination.

*Yes, I have seen some destinations that I didn't even consider before I saw them Instagram or Facebook. Let me put it to you this way, the price caught my eye. (Laughter) Cheap, cheap trips, gets you excited you know. (R9)*

According to Sigala (2012), consumers make use of social media to help them identify new markets and trends, in this sense social media is viewed as a helpful source of inspiration.

Participants reported that social media stimuli served as a source of inspiration for their holiday. It was highlighted that social media and the web served as the most influential source of inspiration for their holiday, participants reported that viewing pictures and videos of friends on Instagram and Facebook pages had evoked a desire to embark on a holiday of their own

*I've seen friends or people that I have known on these amazing holidays, and when I watch...I look at their pictures, I...it's something that I aspire to do. I want to go to these places when the time comes. (R1)*

This is in line with the study by Pan, McLaurin and Crotts, 2007 as cited by Fotis (2015), stating that social media is relevant in the recognising of needs for the traveller. Many travellers may only realise their need to travel through social media platforms. When other tourists post about their personal experiences, a need is triggered in the reviewers to visit certain destinations. Without social media, some individuals might stay ignorant of their need to travel or may be aware of the need to travel but are not motivated to embark on travel in that period. Social media has the power to arouse the travel need in individuals.

What was also largely evident was that people close to participants had the most influence on them wanting to go on their own holiday. This was expected after literature reviewed on the characteristics of consumer behaviour as discussed in chapter four, however what was striking is that participants now receive information from friends and family through social media platforms rather than direct word of mouth. Participants made mention that they would be curious of holiday destinations that they view on family profiles and would then begin collecting information on that destination.

*Another friend of mine went to Croatia, and I had no idea like what Croatia was all about, but having seen her pictures, it's definitely something that's made it more of an appeal. (R1)*

Furthermore, review websites provided participants with a means to gage the experience of other travellers on those travellers' holidays. Although there is no actual physical connection, review platforms such as trip adviser give travellers an insight as to the actual consumption experiences of other travellers

*If you look at what you are able to see on social media, the reviews also give you a better perspective of the places, so you have a more informed and educated guess, on the places you going to visit and these types of things. (R2)*

Kim *et al.* (2013), examined how social media has the ability to provide more detailed information to customers, resulting from the picture-based nature of social media information. Social media was shown to provide direct access to other like-minded individuals, furthermore the ability of social media in providing two-way communication and the ability to continuously monitor experiences through posts, provides an ongoing virtual travel experience that creates a need to travel.

### **6.2.2 Friends and family as inspirational sources of travel motivation**

The advantage of social media and their usefulness to destinations can be seen particularly in an increase in brand knowledge, brand association, word of mouth, friends/liking, trust and social authentication (Kiralova, 2014). Participants indicated that photos and videos of those close to them provided the most influence in directing them to a holiday.

*It has happened that social media influenced me to look at a place that's a possible place to go and then ask my friends and whatever whether they think it's a good idea. (R5)*

The above shows that the social media postings of friends and family provide a stimulus that is viewed as highly inspirational for their own travel. Thus, social media seems to be the protagonist for enhancing the role of friends and family as crucial sources of consumption experiences and ultimately sources of product related information. This concurs with the views of other scholars, whom share the view that friends and relatives are prominent sources of information for travel related decisions (Murphy and Chen, 2014; Decrop and Snelders 2014). Decrop and Snelders (2014), referred to relatives as one of the most influential sources of information.

### **6.2.3 Social Media as a source for inputs to decision making**

The interviews conducted brought to light the extent to which exposure to pictures, videos and comments posted on social media has on active social media users. It is through such exposure that many participants had developed a desire to travel through feelings experienced, these feelings create a need or want to travel and in the case of some participant's, even leads to action.

*If it's a new place you visiting and you don't know much about it, it does...it like...you can...you can find the top ten (10) places to go to, the top five (5) sight-seeing, things to do, you know, and if you want to go to the theatre, or you want to go...depends what's your lifestyle, you know? If you want to go to theatres, or you want to go and do something crazy, you know you find all that on the...on the media...so, it's very informative. (R9)*

According to Tham, Croy and Mair (2013) decision makers, through the internet have a wide variety of destination available to them. Through social media, exists a vast range of information sources that have the ability to influence a traveller's destination choice. Electronic word-of-mouth has introduced decision makers to easily access information and has resulted in a much broader collection of friends that have a potential to influence decision making. In addition, it appears that electronic word of mouth is now given the same credence as word of mouth and is assumed to cause the same influence in destination decision making (Litivin, Goldsmith and Pan, 2008).

### **6.2.4 Development of desire to travel**

Participants reported that their exposure to pictures of friends and family holidays viewed on social media platforms had developed a desire or want to travel themselves. It was

reported that exposure to such images created a need that translated into they themselves starting to investigate similar destinations. It was also mentioned by one candidate that exposure to such stimuli had revived a desire to continue planning a previous trip that had never come to fruition.

*Like recently I saw pictures of Greece, and Greece is a place that I've always desired as a destination to go to. And just, you know, obviously everything about what I had seen in the pictures, enticed me to want to go there even more. (R1)*

The above comment shows that an argument could be made that need recognition is demonstrated by an expression of a want. Thus, holiday travel stimuli found on social media, do contribute to the recognition of a need for holiday travel (Salomon, 2013). Fotis (2015) states in his study, that when exposed to holiday travel related images active users have a generation of travel related wants. The passage above indicates the generating of such wants.

### **6.2.5 Action**

Participants had mixed results regarding the extent to which exposure to social media actually resulted in a purchase. Respondents reported that social media had created an action in them to search for information and begin an investigative process that would result in them seeking and evaluating information.

*I recently went on a cruise and after my trip I kept receiving information regarding upcoming tours and information on how the ship was improving some entertainment and so on. Then on one specific day a special came through and that's the day you've got to take it. So, I booked it and managed to get the trip R3000.00 cheaper (R6)*

Not surprisingly, smartphones are the most widespread devices consumed while on the go. Phones are used by consumers to book travel pursuits, which includes reservations at restaurants and sightseeing tours. Furthermore, consumers depend on their phones for navigation during their travels.

*Well I'm always on social media because with your phone these days you always connected, looking at friends' recent posts and commenting on those posts. If I see a contact that put up a picture of their holiday, then usually I'll post a comment myself. With this holiday as an example, a friend of mine stayed at this lodge a few months back and he posted some amazing pictures of the beach and food, so I commented on that pic and then started to find*

*information on the net about Port St Johns and the Wild Coast. Made my booking and now I'm here. (R10)*

Gohil (2015) indicated that the more time consumers spend on finding information on the internet, the more that information affects their decision making. Electronic recommendations on these social media web sites assist consumers with them making a purchase decision, consumers make choices by benefiting from visitors' former experiences on the social media platforms such as Google, Twitter, Facebook, Picasa, Blog pages and YouTube and they believe that experiences shared by visitors are more real than traditional marketing methods (Casalo *et al.*, 2015). Hence, customers purchasing decision made by consumers during the pre-purchase stage of travel is based on an appraisal of information obtained (Tsotsos and Wirtz, 2015).

#### **6.2.6 Pre-trip self-expression**

Responses from participants revealed that social media was also a tool utilised for the purpose of self-expression prior to the trip. Participants stated that social media allowed them to express themselves through sharing their emotions of happiness or excitement regarding the trip that they were about to embark on.

*When I travel somewhere, I make sure that I announce it. Social media makes it easy because with one click of a button all my contacts can share my excitement. What's nice also is that when you do that your friends are aware that you going to travel then they comment, and it just builds up the excitement for the trip. In a way it also makes me feel happy. (R11)*

Similarly, it was found by Howison *et al.* (2014), that social interaction and the sharing of experiences were major contributors to travellers creating their own content on social media. Another respondent mentioned that sharing aspects of his impending trip with social media contacts helped boast his personal ego by showing off the places he was about to visit.

*Look, before I left for this current trip, I posted on Facebook that I was going to the Wild Coast, I wanted my contacts to know about this unique place I was going to visit, also so that people become aware that I'm away and where they can find me. I guess you can also say I was showing off a bit. (R10)*

The above discussion is in line with the views of Kim *et al.* (2012) as cited by Tussyadiah and Inversini (2015) that individuals with higher levels of self-image had a greater need for

positive feedback from their social media contacts. The need for attention and appreciation seems as a legitimate motivator to share content online and therefore defining one's self through the expression of themselves.

### **6.3 Social media during the trip**

#### **6.3.1 Source for providing inputs to holiday decisions**

As it was found in the pre-trip stage of the holiday, respondents noted that they had used social media while travelling as a means of information source that assisted them in making travel related decisions. Participants revealed that travellers had utilised social media in various ways in order to obtain the information that they deemed necessary. Some contacted people directly on social media in order to request further information, while others had utilised content generated by others that was shared on social media platforms such as TripAdvisor.

*When we have ideas what to do on special places, to give an example, when we reached Port Elizabeth, we will make [we made] a boat tour on the island where we can see Robin [Robin Island], and there we will use [used] the internet to get the information on who offers boat tours. We found several organisations. What are the prices? What are the times? Big boats, small boats, starting in the morning, in the evening? What are the experiences from the other guests? (R3)*

The above response shows how social media has provided a means that allows for the transferring of information between social media users, in which one person is providing suggestions and feedback which can be used by the traveller at that destination. Hence, during the evaluation phase, consumers begin to search and manage information from several sources to satisfy their purchasing desires and evaluate numerous alternatives based on the information gained prior to the buying decision (Nyagi *et al.*, 2012). This appraisal process shows added difficulties in the selection of hotel and accommodation (Harris and Prideaux, 2017).

Furthermore, it was found that during the trip, participants also refer to content that is shared by other travellers whom are not part of their social network. This is done with the premise to access travel related content that will assist in making decisions regarding which attractions or restaurants to visit.

*While I'm driving, you know, going into a small town, I look it up and see what is there of interest to see because sometimes it's not well-known to me. So that makes the trip that much more interesting. You go from A to B, but it's not just a trip, it's a journey and then now every town I go through I try and read up about what's in the town, what do they do? What it's known for, just as a matter of interest. That I do. If I'm at a place...say wherever...say I'm in Lavonia skiing, then I will use that Trip Advisor to see what restaurant we are going to tonight or whatever. (R5)*

Respondents further indicated that social media was not only used for searching information relevant to their trip but also as a way to evaluate a range of alternatives that they had arrived at.

*While we were in Dubai, we were checking different videos on Facebook and YouTube to find out which clubs were best suited to us, the type of music and the environment. There were also some personal videos made by other people that seemed similar to us, so we could kinda get an idea if we would like the atmosphere at those clubs and bars. (R10)*

According to Customer Research North America (2015), during the evaluation stage, customer to customer interaction through social media is now playing a larger role than ever before. This view corroborates the response of the respondent.

### **6.3.2 Source for providing output to holiday decisions**

Looking into the answers that respondents mentioned above, it can be seen that social media is used with the purpose to provide insight for those travellers that use them, travellers no matter to what extent their social media use is, do use it as a provider of information or additional information. In the next example, we find the traveller taking a fairly passive role, preferring to just absorb any content encountered. Respondent noted that social media was used to merely share feedback about a product that he had just consumed. Through participants' communication in regard to their experiences, it can be seen that social media is widely utilized.

*I usually write a review regarding the restaurants that I eat at, regardless if I have had a good or bad experience, as I hope my contribution would help other people. (R2)*

Thus, the providing of output creates additional content on social media which is then used by other members in their information search and evaluation process, thus the traveller that

takes such action in posting comments takes an active role, as they are actively participating on the networks of social media through the creation of content. This type of feedback loop is typically found in the post trip stage, after travellers have had more time to think back and reflect on their experiences. However, it seems as when travellers are on longer trips, they seem to be more relaxed and therefore keener to give up some holiday time to share experiences with the online community. This correlates with Leung *et al.* (2013), in positing that consumers tend to use social media to examine, organise, communicate, and narrate their travel experiences and their own encounters through several channels, such as blogs, websites and online communities that share social information and other tools.

Leung *et al.* (2013), further mentioned, that individuals tend to adopt social media to search, organize, share, and annotate their travel stories and their own experiences through various channels, such as blogs, online communities, and websites that share social knowledge and other tools. Through the views expressed by participants in regard to their experiences, it can be viewed that the social media is widely utilized.

### **6.3.3 Attitude to the internet during the holiday**

With regards to the use of social media and the internet, a prerequisite is the user's access to a device that is internet enabled. From the interviews conducted it was found that participants had such device. However, what was found was that not all participants had positive attitude towards the use of such device during their holiday.

*I don't particularly like posting a lot of stuff while on holiday, I think it just takes away from actually experiencing what is happening. I will post occasionally, if I saw something really amazing, but I would post it once I get back to the hotel and have some time, not in the moment. (R11)*

For such participants it was found that not using an internet enabled device during their holiday was found to be favourable to the extent that it heightened the desirability of the holiday. Although it should be noted that participants that expressed such views were in the minority. In this regard, Wang *et al.* (2011) cited that the expansion of mobile technology has empowered innumerable services that customers can employ to search for the information they need on mobile platforms.

For respondents, the ability to access the internet during their holiday was seen as naturally fitting into their holiday experience. More so, that the lack of ability to use such devices during the holiday would generate a negative attitude through frustration in the inability to connect and share holiday experiences with social media contacts as well as continuing their information search on activities within the place they are staying.

*It's a part of the holiday. I want to show all my mates back home all the cool places I'm visiting. I also want to check other cool places that are near to my location. That's of course if I have internet access, some places don't have good internet or charge crazy prices for the Wi-Fi, that's very annoying because then you must go searching for a place that has internet. (R9)*

From the above statement it can be inferred that participants hold their own set of attitudes towards what they believe constitutes appropriate use of internet enabled devices during the holiday. Ibanez, Sebastia and Onaindia (2016) highlights the negative effects of social media advertising and how advertising messages are becoming lost due to the excessive intrusive nature of some advertising.

#### **6.3.4 Social media as a means of communication during the holiday**

Interviews revealed that respondents use social media as a communication tool while on holiday. Posting pictures and videos allowed them to communicate their experiences with friends and this was a key driver to their use during holidays. The primary reason for this seems to be the need to keep friends and family updated as to their experiences.

*It's not really what I do. But, I will use social media to tell friends that I'm not available for a short like...this walk...or I was not available for five days and...it happened to be my birthday and so....I had to let everybody know that I'm not available. (R5)*

This is supported by Zeng (2013), positing that social media platforms have become increasingly accepted by users and resulted in the transformation of communication between people.

#### **6.3.5 Self-expression during the trip**

Users found that social media as platforms for self-expression during a holiday was essential. Social media allowed travellers to project their perceived feelings and preferences about

their holiday to the world through social media. Respondents revealed that they express themselves during the trip through the sharing of pictures, updates and text messages on social platforms to achieve different purposes.

*“Occasionally when I travel abroad, I go on Facebook and check-in at the place I am visiting, to let my social network where I am, and maybe post a picture as well, so that they can see how awesome the place is.” (R3)*

It could be said that travellers have the urge to make others aware of their travel experiences, this is due to them wanting to remain sociable. In addition, the announcement of their arrival at a certain destination provides the means of communicating their safe arrival at a destination and wellbeing.

This view is consistent with Safco (2010), in stating that social media has become the medium which allows people greater ability to be social. Ioanas and Stoica (2014), mentioned that social networks allow for the ego-enhancements of individuals. The views of these researchers are in line with the response above.

Participant highlighted that experiencing something unique, different or interesting during a holiday also results in the need for travellers to express the feelings that are provoked by such encounters.

*When we were in Liverpool, we went to a football game, a derby game. It was amazing, what an atmosphere, the entire stadium singing, I've never experienced that before, so I took some videos and pictures and posted it on Facebook for my family back home to see. (R3)*

Ionas and Stoica (2014), posited that social media applications allow for the exchanging of information between users whom share similar interests and likes. This corroborates the respondents view above.

It was found that social media were utilised by travellers as platforms that allowed them to self-express both during and prior to the trip. What was of particular interest is the way in which respondents did this while in each stage. Content during the pre-trip usually takes the form of text or messages that describe traveller's upcoming travels while images, videos and text dominate content posted during the trip. Through the provision of images and video content during the trip, travellers are better able to encapsulate the environment visited by them.

## 6.4 Social media after holiday

### 6.4.1 Post consumption evaluation

Active users of social media employed platforms in order to provide outcomes from their holiday travel. It was found that participants used social media as portals to allow them to provide an evaluation of their holiday and resulting experiences, once they had returned from their trip. The motivation for travellers to post feedback relating to their trip are largely differentiated by the extent to which the travel experience was positive or negative. Yoo and Gretzel (2011) suggested that travelers' personality is a critical factor to motivate them to share their experiences on social media, which can also be interpreted in the same vein. Positive experiences that resulted in an experience that was far better than expected, resulted in a greater tendency to post a review.

*Well, a typical example, when I want other people to see, and I want to spread the word to them, Facebook for example, giving my reviews helps my friends to have a look at the holiday that I've been on and obviously influence them, so that when they want a review or they want to go and visit a place, they've seen that I've got the pictures. It makes it easier for them to make their decision. (R2)*

In light of the above, the discussion corroborates with Yoo and Gretzel (2011), in suggesting that travelers' personality is a crucial factor to motivate them to reveal their involvements on social media, which can also be understood in the same light.

*We "check-in" on Facebook that we are at a five- star hotel just so that our "friends" can look at it and be envious. (R6)*

Participants also suggested that they believed that their reviews would be able to correct an incorrect image portrayed about an establishment from previous postings.

*I have a pretty good idea what I'm in for, and if I get to a specific place and it's a bad experience, that I can objectively comment about, then I will do that because then it was a misrepresentation on the internet initially. (R8)*

Further motivation came from the need that some travellers felt was needed in assisting businesses to improve certain aspects of their products or services.

*On the other hand, I write it in such a way that the guy that the place belongs to, can pick up on his service. (R6)*

Some participants also felt the need to praise a service provider for the level of experience offered.

*We have been in a wonderful hotel worth writing about, and we've come to the hotel, it was like a town. It was like a great town. A great, great area, with steps down, steps up, and a great area to go. So we writing about, and the people who reading this I Trip Advisor, give me a lot of "likes" because in the official site of this area, don't write in that we have a lot of stairs and we in a great area and if you want to go to the beach, you have to climb up 10 (ten) minutes and so on. So we write it down and a lot of people like it. (R4)*

With regards to negative experiences participants felt the need to inform other potential travellers as to their bad experiences and thus provided useful information for those travellers to use

*The reasons why I would do it, in the first place if it's a really bad experience I'd want to warn other people. (R7)*

It was also noted that participants felt that they needed to make the online community aware of their negative experiences in terms of what they feel was an unfair exchange between them and the businesses they dealt with.

*Usually I don't write comments when I get back from a holiday, because I don't have time, we get busy and then you just seem to forget about it. Although I will write a review if the place was really bad. Like we went on holiday to the South Coast recently and the pictures on the website looked so good, we thought this was such an amazing place but when we got there it was horrible. We felt deceived, so I made it a point to report this when I got home so others don't fall in the same trap. (R11)*

Hays *et al.* (2013), argued that the rise in popularity of social media has provided travellers with greater power as the resulting authority of tourism organisations slowly decline. Tourism marketers no longer have unprecedented control over the image that they create in respect to their product or destination, this control has been to an extent lost through the provision of platforms from social media allowing consumers themselves to state through comments or pictures what the actual state of affairs is. This is further supported by Loreche,

Habibi and Sankaranarayanan (2012), whom stated that travellers through Web 2.0 technology, can more actively participate in the generation of information that enriches online travel content.

#### **6.4.2 Post trip self-expression**

During interviews participants expressed similar views on social media as platforms that enabled self-expression at the post trip stage of their holiday as found in the before and during stage. This self-expression mostly took place on sites such as Facebook and also review sites. The means of self-expression was also found to be in the form of photos and reviews. Respondents also found the need to share their holiday as a story, serving as a means for self-reflection that could be used in the future. Pan *et al.* (2007) posited that travellers enjoy sharing their travel diaries on social media and this can ultimately result in changing the perceptions of other readers to the image of a certain destination.

*I put up pictures of my holiday after a trip on Facebook to create a time capsule. So basically, that means it's always there for my family to look back on. Sometimes it also nice to go and re-post stuff like that because it can bring back nostalgia. (R9)*

On the contrary, it was viewed that continuing to communicate travel experiences was seen as an inconvenience and brought into context the feeling that people largely shared experiences as a means to show off, however it should be noted that only two participants felt this.

*Look, I post a lot while I'm on holiday but it's really pointless doing it afterwards, I mean the holiday is over? I will sometimes send a picture to my cousin from our trip on WhatsApp and we will talk about how cool that trip was but that's private I won't repost it on Facebook or Instagram for everyone to see. I think people that do that just want to create a fake image of themselves, it's just showing off. (R10)*

### **6.5 Tourism marketing and social media**

#### **6.5.1 Travel brands presence on social media**

Respondents shared the view that it was imperative that travel brands strengthen their presence on social media platforms. It was commonly viewed that travellers are often in need of inspiration and information that will allow them to realise prior goals and plans that have

not manifested. Furthermore, travellers believe that pictures and images of product offerings assist in immersing them in the experience of what they potentially could buy.

*Yes, I think it's very important, receiving push notifications makes me aware what's out there, it exposes me to places of interest I would never have thought about before. I think in general we need such exposure. For example, I would never have visited the Eastern Cape if I didn't read about it on a travel blog that I follow, I would have just done the usual holiday like Cape Town or South Coast, but the pictures of this place just aroused my curiosity. (R12)*

Respondents also mentioned the ability that social media had in influencing their actual purchase decisions.

*Most definitely, because people look with their eyes, they eat with their eyes, they purchase with their eyes. You know, you've got to put a thought in someone's head, and they'll think enough about it to actually want to do it. And, most of us already have a desire to do it, but, it's only when we see it and what it is, the value of it, that we actually purchase it. Like, I'll give you an example. If I want a dress, if I see that dress on social media which is only where I'll be exposed to it, I am more likely to purchase that dress. (R2)*

The comment above corroborate the view of Kiralova (2014) stated that social media has become the new component for buying behaviour, wherein the attitudes of buyers are not only impacted by traditional channels but are extended to online platforms. The online world and social media have become the new means of social communication, providing a platform that can influence purchase decisions (Ioanas and Stoica, 2014).

### **6.5.2 Trust**

Respondents expressed that they had higher levels of trust regarding social media content versus traditional sources such as travel agents. It was noted that this higher level of trust was due to what was perceived by participants as a lower level of bias, or non-bias, honest information of content on social media platforms.

*I often find holiday accommodation or restaurants through travel blogs that I follow. In my case I trust the blogger based on previously good outcomes from her recommendations. Also I believe that such blogs don't have bias and are based on honest judgement combined with*

*detailed information, such as meals the quality of the meals she has had or the environment. (R7)*

Participants had stated that they are more likely to be influenced by information that they trust, thus placing an influential role of social media content as opposed to traditional sources. This is also in part due to the perceived level of objectivity that social media holds for respondents.

*So, I was able to know which resort was most popular with previous visitors and I decided where I would stay through examining comments made by other visitors. These people don't have any reason to misrepresent the establishments, viewing a variety of comments you can gauge the general idea of what a place is all about objectively. I also searched information on prices, menus and food reviews on blogs, this helps learn the honest opinions of these places, and it's helpful. (R5)*

One respondent also mentioned that the way in which information is obtained through social media can greatly increase the quality and trust of information. The respondent comments that travelers should use as many sites as possible to fact check each other and produce greater levels of trust.

*You've got to use it in the right way. You shouldn't just jump from here and there and all over the place. Go to a specific site, get your information, go check on another site. If you get a second site that gives you the same information, then you know that information is good quality. (R6)*

However, participants also expressed concern with the ease at which content could be posted on social media, or companies themselves attempting to improve reality or created by competitors who want to defame other businesses.

*Sometimes it's difficult to determine what is truthful on all this online media. I have often heard about businesses that actually review themselves or go write fake comments about other hotels, it's probably true I guess, who knows, but I reckon if you go through enough sites you probably have a good understanding what you getting into. (R9)*

In this regard, the passage above contradicts the findings of Chu and Kim (2011), who suggested that the opinion seekers in social network sites regard recommendations from their contacts as a reliable source and they rely on social network sites as a place to obtain

information for their purchases. Trust is an important issue for tourists, especially when making holiday purchases due to its intangible nature (Lopez and Sicilia, 2014).

### **6.5.3 Maintaining relationships with travellers on social media**

Respondents believed that travel brands should use social media as the platform for maintaining and building relationships with travellers. This would allow travellers to once again reconnect with past experience that had certain nostalgic significance.

*I think it's nice sometimes to receive messages from a place you visited, well if you have positive memories that is. To give you an example I recently received an e-brochure as to new offerings on a safari lodge that I stayed at last year, it brought back some good memories of the fun times I had with my friends there. (R2)*

Respondents also believed that maintain relationships was important as it would allow them to view special offerings that they could take advantage of.

*I would be interested if they had emailed me because I visited this place before and now I know what the place offers and if they having specials, I know even if I'm not going to use it, I would then post or forward the email to someone else, so they are influencing me in the way that I don't need to now wait for to see an advert in the newspaper or somewhere. It's on my phone. It's instant. (R12)*

Few respondents noted that they would not like constant communication from marketers as it would be perceived as an invasion of privacy and an annoyance. Such respondents preferred to initiate the relationship themselves as this would allow them to have control of the level of communication.

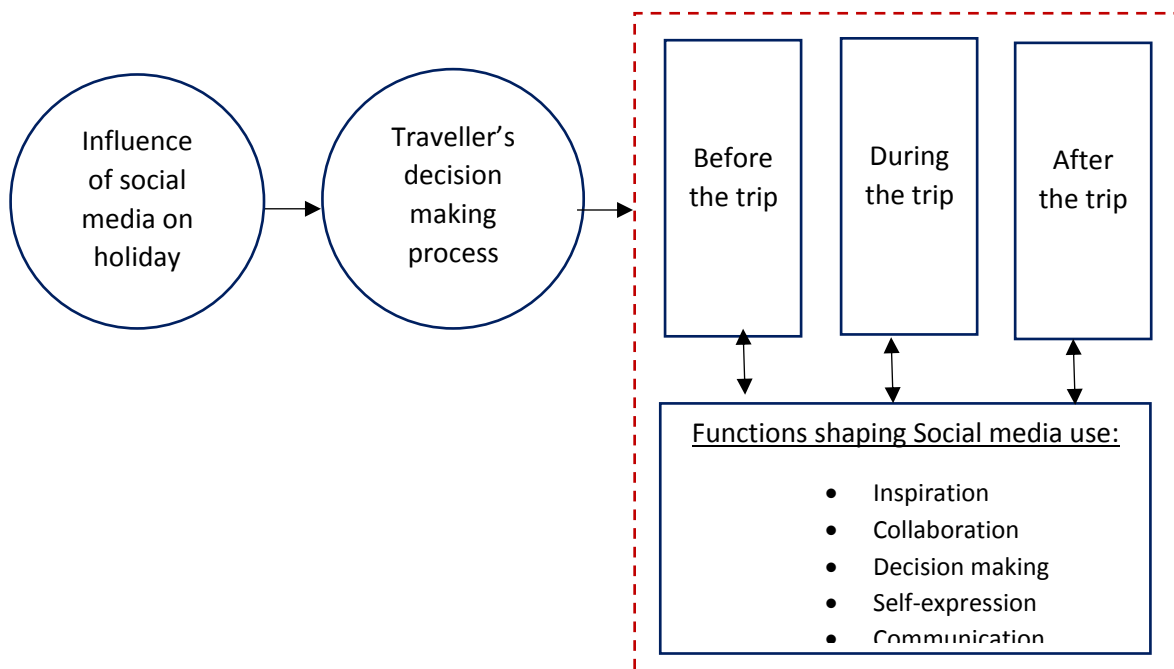
*Not really, I don't really like getting all these promotions and marketing brochures sent to me, it just fills my inbox. Also, when I go on the net I often start receiving notifications about this product and that, the adverts also always pop up and this can be very annoying when I am trying to look for information not pertaining to that product. I think it should be done in a controlled manner that will prevent any irritation from my point of view. (R11)*

In regard to this Bright, Keiser and Grau (2015) assert that in some cases too much information can be seen as overwhelming and could also lead to increased customer confusion.

## 6.6 Model for the study

Based on the literature reviewed in the preceding chapters and the findings from interviews, a model for the study is suggested as indicated in Figure 6.2.

The model for this study shows how the current research seeks to achieve the aims and objectives of this study through exploration of the influences that social media has on traveller's holiday process. Specifically, how the three consumption stages of the holiday process are processed by tourists based on their engagement with social media. Thus, it is assumed that social media provides functional utility for travellers that shape their decision-making process based on the input and output contents received from such platforms.



**Figure 6.1: Proposed study model**

**Source: Constructed by the researcher**

## 6.7 Conclusion

Responses gained from the semi structured face to face interviews conducted with participants have provided insightful understanding of the role that social media plays in the choices that tourists make. From the responses it can be said that social media has great influence on the travel behaviour and planning of tourists. Tourists use the functionalities of social media for different purposes such as inspiration, collaboration, decision making, self-

expression and communication as well as providing the inputs and outputs to travel related decisions. However, the level and extent of information shared through social media is perceived subjectively by individuals, due to the differing patterns and methods that are used to find information. Analyses of the data collected from respondents also brought to light the extent to which content on social media platforms is considered credible and trustworthy, is also very individually dependent.

The next chapter focuses on the key findings of the study based on the insights gained from interviews conducted and suggestions are provided in relation to these findings. Recommendations and conclusion of the study will be presented.

## **CHAPTER 7 – CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **7.1 Introduction**

In this chapter, the conclusions and recommendations of the study are presented. In substantiating the conclusions and recommendations, applicable literature had been used. The study purpose was to explore how social media has influenced travel behaviour of tourists, thus providing insight to service providers to promote their business operations.

This study examined the role that social media plays in evoking influences on the decisions that tourists make while in their travel process. Towards this aim, the study focused on how social media is perceived by travelers to meet their functional requirements during the travel process and the implication of that such influences and functions has for tourism marketing has been highlighted.

Studies related to social media literature have employed a micro approach, this study attempted to take a macro approach in that it attempted to provide insights as to how travellers that are active social media users, engage with social media during their holiday process by adopting a holistic approach in looking at the process that travellers engage in, relating to holiday travel. The review of literature emphasized the macro approach by understanding the nature of social media, how it has shaped the process of decision making through the vast amounts of information available and inter-changeable.

Through synthesis of the findings, this chapter provides an overall view of the influence of social media on the traveller's consumer behaviour in the context of the holiday process. The study's recommendations proposed that N'taba River Lodge take cognisance of the level of influence social media platforms has on consumers. N'taba River Lodge should actively engage consumers through social media at the various stages of travel process, communicating with existing and potential customers of the travel process, as this will allow for the creation of customer loyalty and expose uncaptured consumers to the attributes of N'taba River Lodge as a holiday destination. Understanding the uses and influence of social media will allow N'taba River Lodge to streamline the holiday process for consumers by providing increased efficiency, saving consumers time, money and this ultimately will increase business growth.

## **7.2 Findings of the study**

The findings are discussed in relation to each objective that provided the guidance for the study.

### **7.2.1 Objective One: To explore the influence of social media on the holiday travel process.**

The study found that social media was employed by tourists during all the stages of their holiday. First, tourists used social media as a reference prior to them setting off on their trip. This is seen to be consistent with the view of Fotis (2015), indicating that products that are tourism related usually require higher levels of involvement, due to such products being of higher value and well differentiated. Hence, the need exists in collecting and evaluating as much information as possible, prior to their purchase. In other words, social media allows for tourists to increase their product knowledge and evaluation stage of their decision-making process in order to reduce their perceived risk. Such information needs are aptly met through the searching of travel content on social media platforms. Leung *et al* (2013) states that online travellers are ten percent more likely to come across social media content while making use of the internet.

The study has also found that tourists constantly refer to social media during their trips as well. Travellers have the need to connect with friends and relatives at home while on holiday and social media platforms such as Facebook allows for ease of communication. Furthermore, social media was found to play an important role in allowing travellers to share experiences of their holiday with the online community and in doing so increased what the traveller perceived as their self-image. Tourists also consistently reported that they believed using social media during a trip exposed them to places of interest that they may not otherwise visited.

Luliana *et al.* (2013) highlighted that social media was used mostly after the trip for experience sharing. This was found to be inconsistent with this study as the majority of participants adopted social media more intensely prior to their departure and during their holiday.

## **7.2.2 Objective two: To determine how social media is used by tourists during the holiday travel process**

In relation to the specific functions that social media play on the behaviour of travellers during the holiday process, social media had been found to provide the necessary inspiration that provoked active users in conducting an information search process. It is used to supplement collaboration, decision making as well as to express one's self. It was also discovered that during the holiday travel, users engaged with social media to provide the inputs to their travel decisions. Finally, it was found that on completion of the trip, travellers used social media to convey their experiences with others, to convey their outputs to their decision-making process as well as to further promote their self-expression.

### **7.2.2.1 Inspiration**

Social media platforms are used as sources for providing users with ideas for future travel. In this way social media can be said to provide the stimuli that serves as the incubator for inspiring a holiday. Thus, inspiration can be viewed as a function of social media that can take place either unintentionally or as part of a generic search for holiday ideas. The exposure to images such as holiday photos of other travellers has the capacity to trigger underlying motivation through mental responses that could ultimately lead to the initiation of a holiday. Inspiration as a function of social media is the one that actually takes place before the actual holiday or a decision about a generic holiday trip is actually made. In this sense inspiration as a function of social media takes place prior to initiation of the decision-making process related to a holiday destination, accommodation or activities.

### **7.2.2.2 Collaboration**

Collaboration as a function of social media has been found to mostly take place after a generic holiday decision has been made. Active users had used social media to provide the channels that allowed them to exchange information and experiences with other travellers that would be useful in providing the information as well as the criteria for evaluating options available.

It was also found that those travellers that travelled in groups used social media platforms such as Facebook in order to remove the spatial constraints that would reduce the exchanging of information from the limitation of interactions during the trip planning.

### **7.2.2.3 Decision making**

The role of social media in facilitating the decision-making process of travellers was found to be the most evident function of social media for users. Social media is used by travellers to provide the information sources that are most relevant to their holiday decision. Furthermore, it was found that active users employed social media to provide sources of information in their destination, accommodation and activity DMP. It was further established that social media provided the platforms necessary for evaluation of holiday experiences both during and after a holiday.

### **7.2.2.4 Self-expression**

The adoption of social media as platforms that facilitated as well as hosted holiday related self-expression, is one of the most important roles that social media facilitates for travellers throughout their travel stages. This study adopts a generic definition of self-expression. (Chu and Kim, 2015) considers self-expression as the projection of an individual's thoughts and experiences onto the world. Use of social media as a tool for self-expression has been found at all stages of a traveller's holiday process namely; before, during and after the trip.

### **7.2.2.5 Communication**

Social media is also enabling travellers a means to easily communicate with friends and family throughout their holiday process (Tan *et al.*, 2018). Social media is thus used firstly to keep up with friends as well as inform them as to their movements. It was found to be a very important function of social media as it allowed travellers ease of communication no matter where in the world the travel. What was also discovered was that in some cases communicating with relatives and friends on social media had the capacity to become highly time consuming and took time away from actual holiday.

## **7.2.3 Objective Three: To provide an understanding of the potential implications of social media for tourism marketers**

This study has revealed that social media has played a significant role in unsettling traditional business models by allowing for individuals to create their own content directly with the online community. Service businesses such as N'taba River Lodge, whom do not fully utilise the features of social media in order to increase their exposure and break down communication barriers, will slowly spiral into decline (Arsal, 2010). The study has also

revealed that social media should not be viewed as an extra means of communication by N'taba River Lodge, but rather as the primary source of communicating with potential travellers. Social media as a platform for communication, information exchange and evaluation has proved more effective and convenient, than conventional marketing due to its ability to provide two-way communication.

The study has revealed that social media has raised the level of efficiency as opposed to the communication channels that the industry traditionally relied on. N'taba River Lodge, just like any other company, must ensure that they participate actively on platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, Bookings.com and travel blogs in order to ensure their continued success and growth. Ultimately, social media would allow N'taba River Lodge the potential to engage and interact with travellers and this fundamentally increases the level of satisfaction before travellers even depart their homes, thereby creating a meaningful relationship with a customer and ultimately increasing the level of intimacy of the business relationship.

The study has also found that interacting through social media platforms is considered more trust worthy than commercial advertising. This has also been found to be consistent with other scholars whom have noted the ability that social media can have in generating interest for tourism products (Cohen and Prayag, 2014). The use of social media by marketers can be seen as responsible for converting many potential tourists into actual tourists whom make a purchase. N'taba River Lodge should also attempt to adjust web portals to further open the level of information exchange that could be provided through linking social media platforms with web portals.

The study also found that in general tourists and even potential tourists do not actively avoid social media content relating to tourism marketing but rather are intrigued by such marketing communication as it provides them with exposure to new destinations that might not have been aware to them. Furthermore, potential tourists often keep a look out for potential promotions and special offers which they seem ever ready to actively engage on. Thus, social media can be seen as a tool for marketers to manage customer relationships and lure would be tourists with in- depth focused marketing content.

It was also apparent that tourists enjoy the interaction with other travellers that social platforms allow. This is consistent with the views of Safko (2012) whom emphasised the

potential that social media marketing had to completely revolutionise marketing in tourism and hospitality. This is because people love to talk about their travel experiences as it increases the perception of themselves.

#### **7.4 Recommendations**

This study suggests that Tourism promoters such as N'taba River Lodge should view social media as the tool that will assist in enabling interaction with tourists throughout the various stages of a traveller's holiday process. N'taba River Lodge should not only passively pursue the consumer but should also strive to provide the various social media platforms with content, enabling seamless interaction with consumers. N'taba River Lodge should be seen to actively accompany consumers through their journey by being seen to listen to their views, building trust, maintaining relationships and finally selling. The discussion that follows, provides strategies that are a result of the findings from the study which attempt to promote engagement through social media.

N'taba River Lodge should plan social media campaigns that are aimed at users whom are in their pre-trip or pre-purchase stage by focusing on the destination in conjunction to the related holiday activities at destinations. At this stage, content should be designed to encompass decision making regarding the holiday holistically, thus luring users to action such as searching for information regarding that destination. Content should inspire positive feelings and evoke the desire for a future trip, ultimately placing the destination firmly into the user's consideration.

N'taba River Lodge should ensure that websites are designed to promote a collaboration friendly environment by including tools that enable travellers to share and save travel information such as itineraries flight details, attractions and maps. Details such as this could allow the accommodation provider to arrange travel plans that would provide greater efficiency, safety and reduced cost.

The understanding of how traveller's excess information as part of the decision-making process can assist marketers in providing a guideline for evoking action. N'taba River Lodge should actively utilise platforms such as Facebook, revealing to travellers, which of their social media friends like or have visited a specific destination, leisure venue or establishment. This will allow consumers the opportunity to contact them directly for more personalised advice.

N'taba River Lodge should also encourage the pre-trip self-expression of travellers. To this end, tourism marketers should take cognisance, that travellers are largely motivated by their need to express themselves onto the world, to show off and announce themselves. Self-expression by travellers is most likely to be received through other users' passive attention whom are in all probability themselves are in a state of dreaming about a holiday.

Tourism marketers, such as N'taba River Lodge must raise their level of awareness when it comes to strategies that encourage travellers to freely self-express by posting content such as videos and pictures that clearly show off as well as allow members of the online community to share in experiences. This calls for the adoption of better internet connectivity or the provision of free tourist hotspot sites. Tourism departments should collaborate with local government as well as local hospitality providers in order to provide such locations that can be sporadically found at destinations.

Social media through its ability to provide increased communication at any given time provides the prospect for marketers such as N'taba River Lodge to utilise social media as advertising vehicles. Lastly, travel related applications should incorporate tools that will promote post trip collaboration allowing for travellers to freely share information with the online community.

## **7.5 Recommendations for future research**

From the findings of this study, this section highlights the areas that could be researched in future studies. Prior to a decision being made to travel, users of social media are exposed to passive promotional content. Forthcoming research in this regard could focus on measuring the response to such passive stimuli on the behaviour of travellers. An examination into whether there is an existence of a causal relationship between emotional engagements that result through the exposure of travellers to their social media contacts is another area that future studies could focus on.

Actively engaged social media users, search for information through the utilisation of social media platforms. Future studies could explore the search strategies of tourists when exposed to travel related stimuli. Studies could also look to the nature of search activity in relation to the destination in question. Furthermore, studies providing an understanding as to the search strategies identified in providing information and information evaluation would be of use to tourism marketers.

Some participants expressed that they viewed social media as a distraction during their holiday although very useful. This contradiction could be further examined in a qualitative study that delves deeper into the nature of such contradiction, providing insights as to how social media can play a role either as enhancers or destroyers of the holiday. Further studies could also access the role that social media plays in creating an anti-social environment between members within a travel party.

This study proposed five functional uses of social media. Future studies could take a quantitative approach in confirming the existence of these functions. Future studies could also determine the existence and effect of such functions in the wider context of retail and marketing of products.

## **7.6 Conclusion**

The study has found that social media can be considered as influential to the behaviour of consumers during their holiday process. Tourism businesses that fail to include aspects of social media and connectivity to their marketing campaigns as well as their business as a whole, will fail to increase efficiency and break down communication barriers that are considered as imperative to consumers.

Tourists refer to social media during all stages of their holiday process, by updating friends as to their departure and arrivals, sharing holiday experiences and promoting self-expression. Social media influences the decision-making process of consumers to a considerable extent and has fundamentally changed the way tourists make decisions as well as the extent of user knowledge and sharing.

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# APPENDIX 1: INFORMED CONSENT LETTER

## UNIVERSITY OF KWAZULU-NATAL GRADUATE SCHOOL OF BUSINESS AND LEADERSHIP

**MBA Research Project**  
**Researcher: Kieron Moodley (0329415320)**  
**Supervisor: Prof Cecile Gerwel Proches (0312608318)**  
**Research Office: Ms P Ximba (0312603587)**

Dear Respondent,

I, Kieron Moodley, am a MBA student, at the Graduate School of Business and Leadership, of the University of KwaZulu-Natal. You are invited to participate in a research project entitled, *“The role of social media in influencing tourist consumer behaviour within the holiday travel process”*.

The aim of this study is to explore the influence that social media has on consumer behaviour within the holiday travel process.

Through your participation, the researcher hopes to understand how social media has contributed to the different phases of the holiday travel process as well as to offer insight as to future tourism marketing.

Your participation in this project is voluntary. You may refuse to participate or withdraw from the project at any time with no negative consequence. There will be no monetary gain from participating in this interview. Confidentiality and anonymity of records identifying you as a participant will be maintained by the Graduate School of Business and Leadership, UKZN.

If you have any questions or concerns about participating in the interview or about participating in this study, you may contact me or my supervisor at the numbers listed above.

The interview should take about 45 minutes. I hope you will take the time to participate.

Sincerely

Investigator’s signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

This page is to be retained by the participant

**APPENDIX 2: CONSENT FORM**

**UNIVERSITY OF KWAZULU-NATAL  
GRADUATE SCHOOL OF BUSINESS AND LEADERSHIP**

**MBA Research Project  
Researcher: Kieron Moodley (0329415320)  
Supervisor: Prof Cecile Gerwel Proches (0312608318)  
Research Office: Ms P Ximba (0312603587)**

CONSENT

I..... (Full names of participant) hereby confirm that I understand the contents of this document and the nature of the research project, and I consent to participating in the research project.

I understand that I am at liberty to withdraw from the project at any time, should I so desire.

SIGNATURE OF PARTICIPANT

DATE

.....

This page is to be retained by the researcher

## **APPENDIX 3: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS**

**UNIVERSITY OF KWAZULU-NATAL**

**GRADUATE SCHOOL OF BUSINESS AND LEADERSHIP**

**MBA Research Project**

**Researcher: Kieron Moodley (0836778444)**

**Supervisor: Prof Cecile Gerwel Proches (0312608318)**

**Research Office: Ms P Ximba (0312603587)**

### **Interview Questions**

1. Could you please think back to when your holiday was just an idea? Did social media have any influence in evoking the desire to go on holiday?
2. In planning your holiday, do you use social media for inspiration when evaluating various holiday destinations?
3. Would any information, be it negative or positive, published on social media influence your decision to book a certain destination/ hotel and to what extent?
4. While on holiday did social media expose you to various activities and places of interest? If yes, did you engage in such activities?
5. How often do you continue to post content about your trip on social media after a holiday? What would persuade you to do so or not?
6. While you were still planning your holidays, before your departure, did you visit any social media for any reason related to your trip? If yes, please share.
7. During your holiday, did you visit any social media for any reason? If yes, tell us what you did during these visits. If not, please elaborate.
8. After returning home from your holiday, how would you use social media for any reasons relating to your holiday?
9. In your opinion, what makes social media content successful?
10. Social media marketing generates what is called "electronic word of mouth". How does this new phenomenon affect your decision on selecting a holiday destination?
11. Do you consider social networking websites (Trip Advisor, Blogs etc.) more trustworthy rather than traditional sources of information eg. Travel agencies? Please elaborate.
12. Travel brands who maintain a presence on social media can significantly influence travel plans. Would you agree with this?
13. To what extent is it important for travel brands to build relationships with customers on social media to encourage loyalty and positive word of mouth marketing?
14. Is there anything else that you would like to add?

## APPENDIX 4: ETHICAL CLEARANCE



16 July 2018

Mr Kieron Moodley (203508429)  
Graduate School of Business & Leadership  
Westville Campus

Dear Mr Moodley,

Protocol reference number: HSS/0624/018M

Project Title: The role of social media in influencing tourist consumer behaviour within the holiday travel process

**Approval Notification – Expedited Application**  
In response to your application received 14 June 2018, the Humanities & Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee has considered the abovementioned application and the protocol has been granted **FULL APPROVAL**.

Any alteration/s to the approved research protocol i.e. Questionnaire/Interview Schedule, Informed Consent Form, Title of the Project, Location of the Study, Research Approach and Methods must be reviewed and approved through the amendment /modification prior to its implementation. In case you have further queries, please quote the above reference number.

**PLEASE NOTE:** Research data should be securely stored in the discipline/department for a period of 5 years.

The ethical clearance certificate is only valid for a period of 3 years from the date of issue. Thereafter Recertification must be applied for on an annual basis.

I take this opportunity of wishing you everything of the best with your study.

Yours faithfully

Dr Shamila Naidoo (Deputy Chair)

/ms

Cc Supervisor: Professor Cecile Gerwel Proches  
Cc Academic Leader Research: Professor Muhammad Hoque  
Cc School Administrator: Ms Zarina Bullyraj

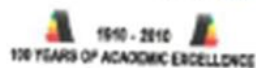
Humanities & Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee

Professor Shanika Singh (Chair)

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Founding Campuses: Edgewood Howard College Medical School Pietermaritzburg Westville

## APPENDIX 5: TURN IT IN REPORT

### Thesis Final

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