SOCIAL MEDIA MARKETING: UTILIZING SOCIAL MEDIA TO ADVANCE BRAND AWARENESS AND INCREASE ONLINE SALES

Muaid Momany
Abdullah Alshboul
Argosy University, Chicago

ABSTRACT

Social media is increasingly important as a marketing tool, but small businesses may be underutilizing it. To date, a small number of studies have investigated the impact of social media marketing on small businesses in the hotel industry. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to investigate the impact of social media on the bed and breakfast (B&B) industry segment, as measured by the influence of social media outreach on brand awareness and online sales. The results of this study indicated strong correlations between the social media outreach efforts, and both brand awareness and online sales.

Keywords: Social media, marketing, bed and breakfast inns (B&B), hospitality, hotels, motels

INTRODUCTION

This research explored the impact of social media on the bed and breakfast industry. Social media are internet tools that facilitate interaction by enabling the continuous generation, exchange, and modification of content (Noone, Mcguire, & Rohlfs, 2011). In the business realm, social media platforms (including Facebook, Twitter, TripAdvisor, LinkedIn, YouTube, Pinterest, Google+, and others) allow consumers to interact with businesses’ online presences in real time, accessing information about products and services and providing direct feedback. This gives businesses the advantage of being able to directly address customers’ problems, which can lead to fewer customers lost due to satisfaction issues (Kim, Lim, & Bryner, 2015). Additionally, social media helps businesses build their brands by enabling the distribution of recognizable content and facilitating world-of-mouth recommendations (Gamboa & Gonçalves, 2014; Hutter, Hautz, Denhardt, & Fuller, 2013).

To maximize the effectiveness of social media, companies must not only respond to customer feedback, but also proactively use social media to expand their customer base and encourage repeat purchases through social media marketing (Leung, Law, van Hoof, & Buhalís, 2013). Social media platforms enable businesses to very quickly share marketing content with large audiences. Thus, social media is a cost saving strategy when compared with traditional media marketing strategies (Dobele, Tolean, & Beverland, 2005). Businesses in all sectors are increasingly adopting social media as part of their marketing and customer relations strategies (Naylor, Lamberton, & West, 2012), but the hotel and tourism industry has used these technologies successfully (Lanz, Fischhof, & Lee, 2010).

This study investigates the impact of social media on the bed and breakfast (B&B) industry segment, as measured by the influence of social media outreach on brand awareness and online sales.
BACKGROUND OF THIS STUDY

Bed and breakfast inns (B&Bs) are small businesses that provide customers with overnight accommodations and serve breakfast. Because 90% of this segment of the hotel industry is characterized by businesses with fewer than 10 employees (Fajardo, 2014), B&Bs often do not have sufficient budgets for large-scale traditional marketing campaigns. Therefore, social media has become a particularly important aspect of B&B marketing and customer relations because of the low cost associated with social media tools (Kasavana, Nusair, & Teodosic, 2010).

Effective use of social media could give B&Bs establishments a competitive advantage, maximizing the amount of business they are able to generate while minimizing their marketing expenditures. To date, research is limited in the B&B segment specifically, but general research in the hotel industry has strongly suggested that the benefits of social media for accommodation establishments include increased visibility and higher sales (e.g., Inversini & Masiero, 2014). European Travel Commission (2010) has even gone so far as to explicitly suggest that to remain competitive, hotels should emphasize online interaction with clients, which is facilitated by social media.

Establishments in the B&B sector have already begun to take advantage of the latest trends or tools of social media (First Research, 2014); however, the challenge for B&B managers is to measure the quantitative impact of these media on business outcomes (Walsh, 2010). Data generated through social media, such as spending patterns and satisfaction ratings, are useful in determining return on investment and other performance indicators (Kasavana, 2008). Nevertheless, it is difficult to tie these results directly to the use of social media (Brooks & Simkin, 2011).

Additionally, few researchers (e.g. Inversini & Masiero, 2014; Scarinci & Richins, 2008) have investigated the differences between various segments of the hotel industry, so the practices that work well for large hotels may not be as effective in the B&B segment. Therefore, there are two problems, which the current research addressed. First, there is a lack of quantitative data related to the impact of social media on B&B establishments, potentially making it difficult for proprietors to justify investment in social media strategies. This leads to an underutilization of social media and, potentially, a loss of revenue. The second problem is a significant gap in the research literature concerning social media and B&B establishments.

Only a few academic studies have investigated B&Bs specifically (e.g. Chen, Lin, & Kuo, 2013; Crawford, Deale, & Merritt, 2013). Given these problems, it was necessary to investigate the extent to which social media marketing and customer relations strategies benefit B&B organizations. If B&Bs are to remain competitive, it was also necessary to discover how these benefits can be more reliably tracked. The goal of this study was to address those problems using quantitative research with a survey design.

Bed and Breakfast and Hotel Internet Marketing

The primary forms of marketing and advertising for bed and breakfasts are word of mouth and Internet presence (Crawford, Deale, & Merritt, 2013). Establishments generally allocate a small proportion of their operating budget to brochures, rate cards, and other forms of print advertising, with a larger proportion allocated to Internet marketing; nearly all B&B establishments had had their own websites for over a decade (Lituchy & Rail, 2000). Despite the
common use of the Internet for marketing, researchers have suggested that B&B owners often lack the knowledge and resources to make effective use of online marketing options (Huang, 2008). Bed and breakfast accommodations usually cost substantially more than standard motel/hotel accommodations; the average room rate for one night at a B&B is approximately $160 (First Research, 2014). For bed and breakfasts, revenue is highly seasonal, with most establishments experiencing high and low seasons based upon the weather, vacation travel, and holidays (Huang, 2008). During the high season, some establishments might achieve 90% occupancy levels. Occupancy rates can dip as low as 20% during the low season. In order to achieve a higher occupancy rate during the off-season, many establishments reduce room rates and offer special promotions (First Research, 2014).

The hotel industry in general is increasingly recognizing the importance of online marketing activities, particularly those that provide a measure of interactivity (Inversini & Masiero, 2014). European Travel Commission (2010) explicitly suggested that hotels should take steps to incorporate online interaction with clients into their operating strategies. However, small businesses in the hotel industry, including B&Bs, have a history of lagging behind larger competitors in the use of the Internet. As early as 2000, before the rise of social media, Lituchy and Rail (2000) reported that a sample of 399 B&Bs and small inns underutilized their websites, failing to provide video and audio content or content in other languages.

Crawford, Deale, and Merritt (2013) conducted a study to assess the state of marketing in the B&B industry. Using an electronic survey instrument, they asked B&B owner-operators about their use of various marketing channels. They identified web-based marketing, including social media and websites, among the most frequently used strategies. Participants of the study also indicated a high degree of effectiveness for web-based marketing. However, web-based marketing was still surpassed by word of mouth marketing in terms of both frequency of use and effectiveness, as perceived by the study’s respondents (Crawford, Deale, & Merritt, 2013). Research conducted by Chen, Lin, and Kuo (2013) corroborated this finding. The researchers used a questionnaire to analyze the effectiveness of various marketing strategies among B&B establishments in Taiwan, and word of mouth marketing again came out on top in terms of frequency and effectiveness (Chen, Lin, & Kuo, 2013).

One limitation of the Crawford, Deale, and Merritt (2013) and Chen, Lin, and Kuo (2013) studies is that both research teams used self-report questionnaires to assess marketing effectiveness from the point of view of establishment owners and employees. It is clear from these findings that small hotel proprietors perceive word of mouth marketing to be the most effective form, but they cannot necessarily be taken as objective indications of the actual effectiveness of various marketing strategies. Indeed, other research approaches have identified an important performance advantage to be gained through online marketing.

For example, Kim, Lim, and Brymer, (2015) conducted a study to investigate the effect of proactive management of online reviews on hotel performance. They collected data on the performance of each hotel in a large hotel chain, their online reviews, and the rate of response to negative reviews for each establishment. The results of their analysis showed that higher overall ratings and higher response rates to negative reviews were directly correlated to hotel performance. They also concluded that proactive management of online presence is a crucial aspect of hotel marketing, and that it can have an observable impact on business outcomes.

Kim, Lim, and Brymer, (2015) focused on a large hotel chain, but researchers have also empirically established the importance of online visibility for small businesses in the hotel
industry. For example, Smithson, Devece, and Lapiedra (2011) investigated the relationships among use of the Internet as a distribution channel, online visibility, and organizational performance at 105 hotels in Spain with under 250 employees. They found no strong correlation between having a website and improved organizational performance. However, Internet visibility was positively correlated with organizational performance, and the difference between web presence and web visibility was a strong indicator of competitive advantage. Businesses that had a web presence that was highly visible during tourists’ online searches, appearing among the top web results, performed better than those that had a web presence but were not highly visible. The researchers concluded that small hotel managers need to be proactive in developing Internet visibility in order to take advantage of the opportunities afforded by web tools (Smithson, Devece, & Lapiedra, 2011). Similarly, Primorac, Smoljić, and Bogomolec (2012) argued that proactive, rather than passive, use of Internet-based marketing strategies is essential for the success of small hotels.

Social media marketing is a unique marketing strategy in that it combines both Internet marketing and word of mouth marketing (Mangold & Faulds, 2009). Indeed, social accessibility was found in one study to be an important predictor of online word of mouth recommendations (Lovett, Peres, & Shachar, 2013). As such, it could enable B&B owners to take advantage simultaneously of both of the most effective marketing strategies. The characteristics and uses of social media marketing are described in detail below.

**Social Media Marketing**

Social media empower firms to captivate shoppers, generally with minimal effort and more productively than more conventional communication devices allow. This makes social media suitable organizations of all sizes (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). Large companies have increasingly begun to employ social media managers to engage in social media full time (Lanz, 2010). Within the hotel industry, empirical evidence suggests that positive comments on social media platforms can have a positive influence on consumers’ attitudes towards hotels (Vermeulen & Seegers, 2009).

Travel Industry Wire (2010) reported one anecdotal success story demonstrating how organizations in the hotel industry can make effective use of social media. Gainey Suites Hotel, in Scottsdale, Arizona, represents itself as “the social media hotel.” According to the report, the hotel emphasizes the use of Twitter, You Tube, and Flickr in its overall marketing strategy, and attributes its success to these platforms (Travel Industry Wire, 2010). The establishment is top-ranked on the travel review site TripAdvisor, and it promotes its special offers through Facebook (Travel Industry Wire, 2010). This success story demonstrates how small hotels can generate business and raise awareness using online marketing and social media.

Not all commentators have agreed that the impact of social media on the travel sector is unequivocally positive. Scott and Orlikowski (2012), for example, researched the impact of social media on accountability in the travel industry. Their results indicated that TripAdvisor and other travel-oriented social media tools had a tendency to remove accountability from hotels and other organizations. The argument was that, since consumers have access to reviews and detailed information about establishments, they should have an understanding of what to expect and therefore should not be dissatisfied. The authors concluded that social media could threaten the integrity of organizations.
Nevertheless, information technology has become increasingly important for the marketing and operations of B&Bs. At the time of this writing, nearly all establishments have websites with many of these also advertising on B&B aggregation sites or online travel agents (First Research, 2014). The B&B industry has begun to engage in efforts to offer innovative and customized applications to customers in order to interact proactively and to provide responsive customer services (Kasavana, Nusair, & Teodosic, 2010). Nevertheless, little research exists related to the use of social media specifically among B&B establishments. The bulk of the research that exists in this area focuses on the hotel industry generally, with samples that include B&Bs as well as larger hotels and motels. Indeed, researchers have noted a paucity of research related to the use of social media as a marketing tool among hotels in general (Phelan, Chen, & Haney, 2013). In this section, the researchers review existing literature related to both large and small accommodation enterprises and suggests potential implications for B&Bs.

Inversini and Masiero (2014) recently conducted a study exploring the importance for online sales of social media and online travel agents among a diverse sample of hotels in Switzerland, including both large and small hotels, B&B establishments. They found that social media engagement, particularly highly visible engagement, predicted online sales. Perhaps their most significant finding, however, was that social media adoption was much higher among businesses using online management tools and among those employing people with Internet-specific skills. Because both of these factors represent increased marketing costs, the Inversini and Masiero finding suggests that smaller establishments with tighter budgetary constraints may be at a disadvantage in terms of effective use of social media.

Harrigan, Ramsey, and Ibbotson (2012) conducted that small businesses, unlike their larger counterparts, do not frequently purchase marketing software packages. They argued that the price of such packages may be prohibitive, and small business owners may not be convinced that the investment in online social media management tools is worth the cost. This underscores the need for this study, which seeks to establish the return on investment for B&Bs of such online marketing strategies. Among larger organizations, adoption of social media marketing has not kept up with increases in consumer use of these tools (Noone, Mcguire, & Rohlfs, 2011).

One reason for this could be the complexity of effective social media engagement. Marketing professionals in the hotel industry need to segment social media engagement in order to target distinct customer profiles. This can be challenging because there is a danger that differentiated social media engagement could send conflicting messages to customers, thereby damaging business performance, if the social media strategy is not coordinated effectively (Noone, Mcguire, & Rohlfs, 2011). Such complications could deter small B&B enterprises from engaging in proactive social media campaigns.

Mangold and Faulds (2009) have argued that it is impossible for businesses to neglect to engage in social media marketing. Even if businesses choose not to establish social media profiles or engage with consumers via social media, consumers will still create social media content related to their experiences with the business. Business owners have no control over the type of content consumers create on social media. If such content is negative, the result may be damaging to a business’ reputation and a decrease in sales. However, businesses that respond to consumers’ social media comments may be able to limit the amount of damage caused by negative publicity. Therefore, it is essential for all businesses to be proactive in engaging in social media communities.
Social Media and Brand Awareness

Since at least the early 1980s, researchers have studied brand awareness and its impacts on consumer behavior and business outcomes (Hoyer & Brown, 1990). They defined brand awareness as “a rudimentary level of brand involving, at the least, recognition of the brand name” (p. 141). The researchers noted that there is a continuum of brand awareness ranging from simple name recognition to thorough, detailed knowledge of a brand, its associated products, and other information. They established evidence that, when consumers are aware of a brand, they are more likely to select that brand when they make purchasing decisions social media can be used to increase brand awareness and engagement, indicating that brand awareness has significance for business outcomes.

More recent evidence establishes that this is still the case. In 2000, Macdonald and Sharp replicated the Hoyer and Brown (1990) study using nearly identical methods. Their results supported those of the original study, indicating that brand awareness was a significant factor in consumers’ choice of products, even when the awareness was attached to lower-quality products. Recently, Huang and Sarigöllü (2012) established a connection between brand awareness and the overall value of the brand.

Broadly, evidence suggests that social media can be used to increase brand awareness and engagement. For example, in a case study of Nestlé UK, Mount and Garcia Martinez (2014) reported that the company was able to substantially improve brand awareness among 18-24 year olds with a social media campaign for its Kit Kat brand. Similarly, brand awareness was positively associated with engagement with a Facebook fan page among customers of car manufacturer MINI (Hutter, et al. 2013).

When comparing customers of the clothing retailer Zara, Gamboa, and Gonçalves (2014) found that those who were fans of the company’s Facebook page were more loyal, more satisfied, and more trusting of the brand than those who were not. Each of the above studies focused on a single, large company, and none of the businesses investigated were in the hospitality industry. However, these preliminary results suggest that social media may present opportunities for businesses to build brand awareness in general, and this statement has received attention among business commentators (Lanz, Fischhof, & Lee, 2010).

Within the hospitality industry, researchers have just begun to direct their attention to the potential of social media. Using a sample of 104 companies in the Malaysian hospitality industry, Yan Xin, Ramayah, Soto-Acosta, Popa, and Ai Ping (2014) found that businesses have begun to realize the potential of social media to build brand awareness, but that overall the tools are underutilized. In a study examining the impact of social media on tourism website traffic, Milano, Baggio, and Piattelli (2011) found that Facebook and Twitter contributed a statistically significant volume of traffic to tourism websites, including those of accommodation providers. Although the researchers did not specifically investigate ownership of the social media pages, they hypothesized that many of those that contributed web traffic to tourism websites were not owned by the businesses running the websites. This implies that social media posts made spontaneously by consumers may be contributing to brand awareness by directing social media users to tourism websites (Milano, Baggio, & Piattelli, 2011).

Brand awareness may increase performance in the hotel industry even when the awareness is associated with negative publicity. Vermeulen and Seegers (2009) found that customers are more likely to choose hotels if they have read reviews of the hotels, irrespective of whether the reviews are positive or negative. Although this study did not specifically address
social media, reviews are an inherent part of the social media experience for brands on the most popular platforms, including Facebook.

Social Media and Online Sales

Compared with the paucity of research on social media’s effect on brand awareness, the relationship between online sales and social media is a well-studied area. It was found that social media has become a key source of researching for travelers; 83% utilize social media for research purposes. Of these, 77% travelers referred to the reviews by other travelers to finalize their travel destination (Wilker, 2007). This finding shows that social media has emerged as a powerful tool influencing purchasing decisions in travel-related industries.

As with other areas related to the research topic, there is little or no existing research focusing specifically on B&B establishments. However, the hotel industry broadly has been investigated in this connection. Inversini and Masiero (2014) revealed a strong relationship between online visibility, including social media presence, and online sales among a sample of hotels. They also found that social media was perceived as more important among hoteliers running larger establishments (as measured by hotel room capacity), suggesting that small-capacity establishments like B&Bs may underestimate the importance of social media.

Although it seems clear that social media can help generate online sales, the mechanisms by which this interaction takes place are poorly understood. One research team suggested that the balance between online and offline sales is not affected by factors related to the establishment, being influenced instead by the type of travel (Cronjé, Gugić, & Karlovčan, 2010). In their study, Pöyry, Parvinean, and Malmivaara (2013) investigated the effects of several factors related to consumers’ Facebook usage on business performance among 1,162 visitors to the Facebook page of a travel agency. Their results showed that the number of people who “like” a company’s Facebook page does not necessarily have an effect on the company’s sales. However, they found that users, who simply browsed without becoming members of the Facebook page, were more likely to have purchase intentions and to refer the company to others.

This reveals a two-dimensional mechanism of social media’s impact on online sales. First, it is necessary for businesses to generate online communities, thereby extending the reach of their social media sites. Second, it is essential to ensure that those who browse the page are easily able to make recommendations and purchases, even if they are not themselves members of the established online communities (Pöyry, Parvineen, & Malmivaara, 2013).

Social media’s impact on sales is not always positive. Kasavana, Nusair, and Teodosic (2010) concluded that social media expose organizations in the hospitality industry to significant risk related to negative reviews, unfair criticism, and unfounded speculation (Wagstaff, 2010). However, this does not necessarily represent an argument against social media involvement. According to Mangold and Faulds (2009), proactive engagement in social media can help businesses avoid negative consequences from unfounded negativity on the part of consumers.

Social media interactions could have an effect on sales via traditional media. This possibility was uncovered by Stephen and Galak (2012) in their study of the effect of traditional earned media (e.g., press publicity) and social earned media (e.g., consumer blog and social media posts) on sales activity. According to their results, high levels of social earned media played a role in increasing traditional earned media. In other words, if a business is mentioned frequently by consumers on social media, that company is more likely to earn publicity in traditional press outlets than a company that lacks such significant social media activity (Stephen
In addition to partly explaining the importance of social media on sales, this study highlights the complexity of social media as it pertains to business results (Mowat, 2010). By clarifying the role of social media among B&Bs, the proposed study should make it easier for B&B proprietors to engage in effective social media practices specific to the B&B segment.

**HYPOTHESES**

The objective of this study is examine the impact of the social media outreach efforts on the brand awareness, and online sales among bed and breakfast establishments, as perceived by the proprietors of those establishments. Based on the objective, the following null and alternative hypotheses were developed and tested:

\[ H_0: \text{There is no significant relationship between social media outreach efforts and brand awareness among bed and breakfast establishments, as perceived by the proprietors of those establishments.} \]

\[ H_1: \text{There is significant relationship between social media outreach efforts and brand awareness among bed and breakfast establishments, as perceived by the proprietors of those establishments.} \]

\[ H_0: \text{There is no significant relationship between social media outreach efforts and online sales among bed and breakfast establishments, as perceived by the proprietors of those establishments.} \]

\[ H_2: \text{There is significant relationship between social media outreach efforts and online sales among bed and breakfast establishments, as perceived by the proprietors of those establishments.} \]

**METHODOLOGY**

**Survey Instrument**

The researchers designed a survey to gather data (Appendix A). The survey was composed of multiple-choice items designed to elicit information regarding demographics (location [rural, urban], number of rooms, seasonal; survey items 1-3), proprietors’ perception of social media outreach efforts by proprietor and/or employees (survey items 4-8); proprietors’ perception of brand awareness of their bed and breakfast establishments (survey items 9-12); and online sales (survey items 13-14). The items were modeled on similar items and findings from related literature and adapted to suit the bed and breakfast setting.

A review panel of five individuals (including university faculty, colleagues, and consultants) was recruited to determine the survey’s validity and to examine the survey’s construction. After being briefed on the study’s background and design, the panel members were asked to review the survey’s introduction and questions to ensure that each item’s purpose matched its content, advise of any need for rewording or deletion, and identify any errors in grammar and syntax. Panel members were also asked to recommend additions to the survey that might help address the research questions. After major revisions to the survey, the panel review process was repeated, after which only minor revisions were necessary.

To determine internal consistency, Cronbach’s alpha was used. Cronbach’s alpha is a measure of internal consistency. It is a popular measurement used to establish reliability.
Cronbach’s alpha is a coefficient that ranges from 0 to 1. An alpha coefficient of 0.7 or higher is considered an indication of good reliability (Bruin, 2006). After modifications for face validity (per the panel review), the survey for this study fit this criterion of reliability.

SurveyMonkey was used to distribute the survey. The population of interest in this study was B&B proprietors with establishments located in the United States. The purpose of this study was to examine the impact of social media on the B&B industry, as measured by the influence of social media outreach on brand awareness and online sales. The researchers also sought to establish whether the current social media strategies used by B&B establishments are effective, in order to provide insight into how this unique business sector can optimize and track its use of social media.

Sample and Data Collection

The target sample size for this study was 120. The actual sample size was 144. Convenience sampling was used to select the sample for the study; SurveyMonkey’s participant solicitation service was employed.

G*Power (Faul, Erdfelder, Buchner, & Lang, 2009) was used to calculate the sample size. G*Power is “a tool to compute statistical power analyses for many different t tests, F tests, \( \chi^2 \) tests, \( z \) tests and some exact tests” (Buchner, 2013, para. 1). With alpha = .05, power = 0.80, effect size = .15 (medium), and number of predictors = 4, the necessary sample size was calculated to be 80. According to Salkind (1997), researchers should increase their sample when sending out surveys by a factor of 50% to allow for non-respondents.

Measurement of Variables

Total scores for branding awareness were calculated as the sum of items 9 (How much do you feel you get from the Social Media in terms of SEO [Search Engine Optimization]?) and 11 (How much do you feel you get in terms of business and branding from Social Media?). Both items were scored on a 3-point scale ranging from 0 (nothing) to 3 (a lot). Therefore, the range of possible scores for branding awareness was 0-6. The actual range for the research sample was 0-6, with a mean score of 3.3, standard deviation (SD) = 1.2. By dividing the overall mean by two items, the mean response for each item is calculated to be 1.7, between 1 (not much) and 2 (some).

Percentage of sales from social media was measured by Item 13 (What percentage of your sales comes from social media [Facebook, Twitter, Linked-In, You Tube, TripAdvisor, Yelp, Pinterest, Google+]?). Respondents could choose from six options, which were coded as follows: 0% = 0, 1–10% = 1, 11–20% = 2, 21–30% = 3, 31–40% = 4, and more than 40% = 5. Therefore, the possible score range was 0–5. The actual range was 0–3, and the mean for this research sample was 1.3 (SD = .6), which would be between 1-10% and 11-21% of sales from social media.

The independent variable in this study was social media outreach efforts. A total score for outreach efforts was calculated as the sum of items 5 (Do you make any management decision based on social media feedback?; coded no = 0 and yes = 1), 6 (How many years have you been using social media?; coded 1-2 = 1, 3-5 = 2, 6-10 = 3, more than 10 = 4), 8 (How many hours a week on average do you spend using social media to market your business?; coded 0 = 0, 1-2 = 1, 3-5 = 2, 6-10 = 3, more than 10 = 4), and 7 (total number of media venues used out of nine choices; coded no = 0, yes = 1, and summed to get total number of venues used). The possible
scores could range from 2 to 16. The sample outreach efforts score actually ranged from 3 to 16, with a mean score of 9.1 SD = 3.3).

Data Analysis

After data cleaning, data were loaded into Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 23 (IBM Corp., 2013) for analysis. The researcher used hierarchical regression in order to determine the relationship of the dependent variables (DVs) with the independent variable (IV), while controlling for the covariates.

RESULTS OF STUDY

Descriptive Statistics

This section contains a description of the data, including the characteristics of the sample and frequencies related to the research variables. The researchers also present the frequency of use of various social media platforms. Table 1 summarizes the covariate descriptive statistics for this sample.

The majority (n = 65, 57%) of respondents ran B&Bs located in rural areas. Most (n = 76, 67%) of the B&B establishments had between 3 and 10 bedrooms. The least frequently reported number of rooms was 1-2 (n = 17 establishments, 14.9%). A large majority (n = 91, 80%) of respondents reported that their B&Bs were open year round; the remainder were open only seasonally. Table 2 summarizes the descriptive statistics for these variables.

Table 1
Covariate Descriptive Statistics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Location</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rural</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>57.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Urban</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>43.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Number of bedrooms</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1-2</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>14.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3-5</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>31.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6-10</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>35.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More than 10</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>18.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>When open</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year round</td>
<td>91</td>
<td>79.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seasonal</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>20.2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 2
Variable Descriptive Statistics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Minimum</th>
<th>Maximum</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Outreach efforts</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>9.1</td>
<td>3.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brand awareness</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3.3</td>
<td>1.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percent of sales</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1.3</td>
<td>0.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The results for question 12 (Of the social media venues available, which ONE do you feel you get the most from social media in terms of business branding?) and 14 (Of these social media platforms, which one generates the most revenue in your B&B?). The highest proportion \((n = 29, 25.4\%)\) chose “Other” while the lowest proportion chose Pinterest \((n = 2, 1.8\%)\). For both questions, YouTube and Google+ took second and third places, respectively, and TripAdvisor and Yelp were in the middle. Table 3 summarizes the results for Items 12 and 14.

Overall, TripAdvisor was perceived as more effective for branding than for revenue. Twitter was perceived as the most effective for branding about twice as often as for revenue. Conversely, Yelp was perceived as more effective for revenue generation than for branding.

Table 3
Social Media Proprietors Feel They Get the Most From

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>In terms of branding (Item 12)</th>
<th>In terms of revenue (Item 14)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Frequency</td>
<td>Percent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>16.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>You Tube</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>15.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Google+</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>12.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trip Advisor</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>13.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Twitter</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>11.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yelp</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>9.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Facebook</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>8.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LinkedIn</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>7.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pinterest</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4.4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The Regression Analysis

a. The assumption of linearity and normal distribution

Multiple regression analysis assumes that the relationships between the dependent variables and the independent variable are linear and that residuals are normally distributed. Table 4 summarizes the results of the test for linearity. Correlations between the dependent variables (brand awareness and percent of sales) and the independent variable (social media outreach efforts) were calculated as presented in Table 4. The dependent variable percent of sales correlated with the independent variable \((R = .514, p < .001)\). The dependent variable brand awareness also correlated with the independent variable \((R = .563, p < .001)\). These significant correlations supported the assumption the relationships between the DVs and the IV are linear.
Table 4
Correlations of Dependent Variables with Independent Variable

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dependent variables</th>
<th>Outreach efforts</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Per cent of sales</td>
<td>Correlation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sig. (2-tailed)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brand awareness</td>
<td>Correlation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sig. (2-tailed)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* * p < .01

b. The potential of multicollinearity

Multiple regression analysis assumes the potential of multicollinearity. To test for multicollinearity, the researchers examined the variance inflation factor (VIF) and tolerance for the independent variable (social media outreach efforts) in regression analyses where the covariates were present. A tolerance close to 0 was taken to indicate multicollinearity. A value of 0.1 served as the cutoff. A VIF value close to 10 was taken to indicate multicollinearity. Table 5 summarizes the multicollinearity results.

For the regression with percentage of sales as the dependent variable, the tolerance for outreach efforts was .991 (greater than the cutoff of 0.1) and the VIF was 1.009 (smaller than 10). These statistics indicate there is no multicollinearity for outreach efforts with the covariates in the regression where percentage of sales was the dependent variable. In the regression where brand awareness was the dependent variable, the tolerance for effort was .980 (greater than the cutoff of 0.1) and the VIF was 1.021 (smaller than 10). These statistics indicate there is no multicollinearity for outreach efforts with the covariates in the regression where brand awareness was the DV.

Table 5
Multicollinearity Tests

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Regression DV</th>
<th>Tolerance</th>
<th>VIF</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Percent of sales</td>
<td>.991</td>
<td>1.009</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brand awareness</td>
<td>.980</td>
<td>1.021</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Hierarchical Regression Analysis

Hierarchical regression was used to determine the relationship between the dependent variables and the independent variable while controlling for the covariates. Separate hierarchical regressions were completed for the two dependent variables (brand awareness and percent of sales). The hierarchical regressions were carried out in two steps. The first step involved a model including the dependent variable and the covariates, but not the independent. The second step involved adding the independent variable to the model and analyzing the extent to which the explanatory power of the model changed, and whether the independent variable (social medial outreach score) was significant.
Tests of Hypotheses

Table 6 summarizes the results of the tests related to this hypothesis. Without the independent variable, the model was not significant ($F[3, 110] = .76, p = .522$). The covariates (location, number of rooms, when open) did not significantly correlate with the dependent variable (brand awareness). After adding the independent variable, the model was significant, ($F[4, 109] = 27.37, p < .001$).

The addition of the independent variable (outreach effort) significantly increased the variance in brand awareness explained by the composite of the variables (change in $R^2 = .48, p < .001$). An $R^2$ of .48 indicates a large effect size, which suggests a strong relationship between outreach effort and brand awareness. The coefficients for the covariates (location, number of rooms, when open) were not significant. The coefficient for the independent variable social media outreach effort ($\beta = .70, p < .001$) was significant. Thus, the first-null hypothesis was rejected because it proposed that, there is no statistically significant relationship between social media outreach efforts and brand awareness. Therefore, the alternative hypothesis (There is a significant relationship between social media outreach efforts and brand awareness) was accepted. When controlling for the covariates (location, number of room, when open), the independent variable (outreach effort) explains a significant portion of the variance in brand awareness.

### Table 6
Hierarchical Regression Analysis for Brand Awareness Regressed on Outreach Effort and the Covariates

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>SE B</th>
<th>$\beta$</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Step 1 $F (3, 110) = .76, p = .522$</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Location</td>
<td>-.16</td>
<td>.24</td>
<td>-.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of bedrooms</td>
<td>-.16</td>
<td>.12</td>
<td>-12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year-round</td>
<td>-.07</td>
<td>.30</td>
<td>-.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Step 2 $F (4, 109) = 27.37, p &lt; .001$</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Location</td>
<td>-.10</td>
<td>.17</td>
<td>-.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of bedrooms</td>
<td>-.09</td>
<td>.09</td>
<td>-.07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year-round</td>
<td>-.17</td>
<td>.21</td>
<td>-.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outreach effort</td>
<td>.26</td>
<td>.03</td>
<td>.70**</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note. $R^2 = .02$ for Step 1; $\Delta R^2 = .48, p < .001$ for Step 2
*p < .05; **p < .01

Table 7 summarizes the results of the analysis for this hypothesis. Without the independent variable, the model was not significant ($F[3, 110] = .37, p = .773$). The covariates (location, number of rooms, when open) did not significantly relate to the dependent variable (percent of sales). After adding the independent variable, the model was significant ($F[4, 109] = 9.92, p < .001$). The addition of the independent variable (social media outreach effort) significantly increased the variance in percent of sales explained by the composite of the variables (change in $R^2 = .26, p < .001$). An $R^2$ of .26 indicates a large effect size or a strong relationship when outreach effort is added to the model.
Table 7
Hierarchical Regression Analysis for Percent of Sales Regressed on Outreach Effort and the Covariates

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>SE B</th>
<th>β</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Step 1 $F(3, 110) = .37, p = .773$</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Location</td>
<td>-.04</td>
<td>.11</td>
<td>-.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of bedrooms</td>
<td>-.05</td>
<td>.06</td>
<td>-.08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year-round</td>
<td>.08</td>
<td>.14</td>
<td>.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Step 2 $F(4, 109) = 9.92, p &lt; .001$</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Location</td>
<td>-.01</td>
<td>.10</td>
<td>-.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of bedrooms</td>
<td>-.03</td>
<td>.05</td>
<td>-.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year-round</td>
<td>.05</td>
<td>.12</td>
<td>.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outreach effort</td>
<td>.09</td>
<td>.02</td>
<td>.51 **</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. $R^2 = .01$ for Step 1; $\Delta R^2 = .26, p < .001$ for Step 2

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$

The coefficients for the covariate (location, number of rooms, when open) were not significant. The coefficient for the independent variable effort outreach ($\beta = .51, p < .001$) was significant. Thus, the null hypothesis was rejected because it proposed that “There is no significant relationship between social media outreach efforts and online sales.” Therefore, the alternative hypothesis (There is a statistically significant relationship between social media outreach efforts and online sales” was accepted. When controlling for the covariates (location, number of room, when open), the independent variable (outreach effort) explains a significant portion of the variance in percent of sales.

**DISCUSSION**

The results of this study made it clear that B&B proprietors in the United States perceive social media as an effective tool for generating brand awareness and increasing sales revenue through online channels. For this quantitative survey study, the research question was: What relationships, if any, exist among social media outreach efforts, brand awareness, and online sales among bed and breakfast establishments, as perceived by the proprietors of those establishments? In general, it is possible to answer the research question by asserting that there are strong positive correlations between, on the one hand, social media outreach efforts and brand awareness, and, on the other, social media outreach efforts and online sales.

In the case of brand awareness, the correlation was particularly strong, with a beta coefficient ($\beta$) of .70 ($p < .001$). The $\beta$ is an indication of the expected increase in the dependent variable when the independent variable increases by one unit (Hair, Black, Babin, Anderson, & Tatham, 2006). In this case, if social media outreach effort increases by one unit, we would expect an increase of .70 in brand awareness. By contrast, the $\beta$ for online sales was .51 ($p < .001$). This indicates that, when participants engaged more frequently in online marketing, they concomitantly experienced more brand awareness and more online sales from social media than those who did not. However, for participants who used social media marketing, the benefits to brand awareness were about 27% stronger than the benefits to revenue as measured by online sales.
The greater impact of social media marketing on brand awareness is also reflected in the data frequencies. For brand awareness, the possible score range was 0-6, and the actual score range among the sample was also 0-6, with a mean of 3.3. By contrast, the possible score range for online sales was 0-5, but the actual score range was only 0-3, with a mean of 1.3. This shows that none of the participants felt they were receiving the maximum possible benefit to online sales from social media marketing. It can be confidently concluded from this that social media marketing efforts among B&B proprietors are more beneficial to brand awareness than to online sales.

This is an important finding because, to date, little research has been conducted on social media marketing’s effect on brand awareness. A few studies have supported the link (Gamboa & Gonçalves, 2014; Hutter, Hautz, Dennhardt, & Füller, 2013), but, to this researcher’s knowledge, this is the first study to demonstrate such a link in a small business B&B environment. Additionally, much prior research has emphasized the importance of social media for revenue, but this study shows that brand awareness may be a more important outcome of social media marketing efforts.

Further research will be needed to confirm this finding, it is important that B&B proprietors align their marketing strategies with the tools that can yield the most benefit. Lack of resources may be preventing B&Bs from changing existing social media strategies, despite their suboptimal nature. For example, established Pinterest accounts may be easy to maintain despite being unimportant to revenue and branding. Although proprietors perceive that YouTube would be more effective, they may fail to make use of YouTube due to the resource-intensive nature of producing videos and maintaining or creating a YouTube presence.

Finally, when asked which social media tool was most useful, the participants most frequently chose “Other,” indicating that there are social media tools not examined in this study that should be investigated as to their impact on B&B business outcomes. Unfortunately, it is not possible to tell from the data collected for this study what other social media tools B&B proprietors are using. One possibility is the website AirBnB, which allows users to list short-term rental properties and accept bookings and payment, with or without official business licenses (Mattson-Teig, 2015). To the researchers’ knowledge, there is currently no peer-reviewed research on the use of AirBnB in the B&B segment.

**RECOMMENDATIONS**

One aim of this study was to provide insight into the social media marketing practices that could be useful at B&B establishments, in order to help proprietors to justify resource expenditures on social media marketing. It is clear from this research that social media marketing generally can lead to brand awareness and online sales if it is used proactively. This study also yielded some insights into ways in which B&B establishments could begin to improve their social media marketing strategies.

First, it is recommended that B&B proprietors devote more time to engaging in social media marketing activities. In this study, participants who did not engage in social media marketing were not able to generate brand awareness and online sales from those sources. Therefore, passive social media presence does not help B&B establishments generate businesses. There is no “set it and forget it” solution to social media marketing—the more time and resources proprietors devote to these activities, the stronger their results will be.
Second, it is recommended that B&B proprietors who currently engage in social media marketing should reevaluate the social media tools they are using and realign their marketing strategies to be more effective. In particular, engaging in Pinterest, Facebook, and Yelp may not be as beneficial as engaging in YouTube and Google+. Although it cannot be definitively stated from the results of this study that YouTube and Google+ are more effective, it is generally clear that B&B proprietors could benefit from a reevaluation of their current marketing strategies. As technologies and social media tools change, B&B proprietors should consistently engage in this sort of evaluation to ensure that they are maximizing the benefits of their limited marketing resources.

Finally, recommended that B&B proprietors focus on converting brand awareness into measurable sales. Although brand awareness is crucial to business success, ultimately B&Bs must book guests in order to survive. As small businesses, B&Bs are important to the hotel industry and the economy at large. Therefore, it is important that social media marketing campaigns are designed to generate revenue. Marketing demands considerable time and money resources, and B&B establishments will better thrive if they are able to recoup these expenditures directly. The results of this study show that B&Bs have room to improve the degree to which their social media outreach efforts generate tangible sales.

CONCLUSION

Based on this study, it can be concluded that, when controlling for the covariates (location, number of rooms, when open), there is a strong relationship between perceived social media outreach efforts and both perceived brand awareness and perceived percent of online sales. This suggests that as B&B proprietors engage in more social media outreach efforts, they see increases in the public’s awareness of their businesses and in the volume of online sales. Interestingly, the effect sizes for both hypotheses were large ($\beta = .70$ and $\beta = .51$, respectively), indicating that the association between engagement in social media and business outcomes could be quite strong. It is also intriguing that none of the covariates (location, number of rooms, or when open) were associated with these effects, suggesting that social media engagement has benefits for B&Bs regardless of the characteristics of individual establishments. The sample and variables were described, and the results of the tests for assumptions and multicollinearity were reported. Data conformed to the assumptions for multivariate regression analysis, and no problems with multicollinearity were observed. Based on hierarchical regression analyses, both null hypotheses were rejected and the alternative hypotheses supported.

REFERENCES


Naylor, R., Lamberton, C., & West, P. M. (2012). Beyond the “like” button: The impact of mere virtual presence on brand evaluations and purchase intentions in social media settings. *Journal of Marketing, 76*(6), 105-120. doi:10.1509/jm.11.0105


**About the Authors:**

*Muaid Momany* received his Doctorate in Business Administration (DBA) in Marketing from Argosy University, Chicago Illinois. Dr. Momany obtained a Master of Business Administration (MBA) from Lewis University, Chicago Illinois. He also holds a degree in Computer Science (Bsc.) from Princess Sumaya for Technology University, Amman Jordan. His research specialties include social media marketing, online sales, the hotel industry, and small and medium enterprises (SMEs).

*Abdullah Alshboul* is currently teaching for the Graduate School of Business and Management at Argosy University, Chicago. He holds a Doctorate in Business Administration in Information Systems and Master in Computer Science from Northeastern Illinois University/Chicago and Bachelor of Science in Electrical Engineering-Telecommunications from University of Pristina, Yugoslavia. Dr. Alshboul gained his professional experience, as a team leader for AIMS Wireless Solutions, a real estate broker, Liquidation manager and co-founder of USS, data maintenance manager for SBC (at&t), network engineer for UPS. Also, Dr. Alshboul taught at various educational institutions such as DeVry University, Keller Institute, South University, and Robert Morris University.
Appendix I
Survey Questionnaire

I would like to thank each of you in advance for taking the time to help me complete this research for my dissertation. You are cordially invited to participate in a research study. The purpose of this research is to study the role of Social Media in Bed and Breakfast in terms of brand awareness and sales from proprietors’ perspective. This research study is for a dissertation and is in partial fulfillment of the researcher's requirements for completion of their doctoral program.

Should you participate in this research, you will be asked to answer an online survey. The survey will consist of approximately 14 questions and should not take more than 10 minutes to complete. The demographic questions will be about your B&B establishment size, Social Media usage, Social Media impact in terms of brand awareness and sales. Your participation in this research is strictly voluntary and all information given will be anonymous.

You may refuse to participate entirely, or choose to stop your participation at any point during the research, without fear of penalty or negative consequences of any kind. The information/data you provide for this research will be anonymous, and all the raw data will be kept in a secure file by the researcher. Although SurveyMonkey has an option available enabling the researcher to find the IP address, this function has been turned off, therefore it will be impossible to know the source of any of the responses.

I understand that this research study has been reviewed and certified by the Institutional Review Board, Argosy University–Chicago. For research related problems or questions regarding participants’ rights, I can contact the IRB chairperson on 225 N Michigan Ave, suit 1300 (312) 777-7713 or researcher via email muaidmomany@argosy.edu

I have read and understood the explanations provided to me. I have had all my questions answered to my satisfaction, and I voluntarily agree to participate in this study. I understand that I am entitled to a copy of this consent form, and I can always go back to the survey link and print out a copy of this consent form for my own records. Clicking “Next” on the bottom of the current webpage indicates that I am electronically submitting my signature to participate in this survey and that I am over the age of eighteen.

If you AGREE then press NEXT
Survey Questionnaire

Please answer all questions to the best of your ability.

1. Where is your B&B located?
   ☐ Rural area  ☐ Urban area

2. How many bedrooms/suites does your establishment have?
   ☐ 1-2  ☐ 3-5  ☐ 6-10  ☐ More than 10

3. Is your B&B open year-round or seasonally?
   ☐ Year-round  ☐ Seasonally

4. Do you do your own marketing by using social media (e.g., Facebook, Twitter, etc.) for your business?
   *If your answer is NO then do not answer the rest of the questions and thank you for your cooperation*
   ☐ Yes  ☐ No

5. Do you make any management decision based on social media feedback?
   ☐ Yes  ☐ No

6. How many years have you been using social media?
   ☐ 1-2  ☐ 3-5  ☐ 6-10  ☐ More than 10

7. Of the social media venues available, which do you use? (Check all that apply)
   ☐ Facebook  ☐ Twitter  ☐ Linked-In  ☐ YouTube  ☐ TripAdvisor
   ☐ Yelp  ☐ Pinterest  ☐ Google+  ☐ Others

8. How many hours a week on average do you spend using social media to market your business?
   ☐ 0  ☐ 1-2  ☐ 3-5  ☐ 6-10  ☐ More

9. How much do you feel you get from the Social Media in terms of SEO (Search Engine Optimization)
   ☐ Nothing  ☐ not much  ☐ some  ☐ a lot

10. Of the social media venues available, which ONE do you feel you get the most from Social Media in terms of SEO (Search Engine Optimization)?
    ☐ Facebook  ☐ Twitter  ☐ Linked-In  ☐ YouTube  ☐ TripAdvisor
    ☐ Yelp  ☐ Pinterest  ☐ Google+  ☐ Others

11. How much do you feel you get in terms of business and branding from Social Media?
    ☐ Nothing  ☐ not much  ☐ some  ☐ a lot

12. Of the social media venues available, which ONE do you feel you get the most from Social Media in terms of business branding?
    ☐ Facebook  ☐ Twitter  ☐ Linked-In  ☐ YouTube  ☐ TripAdvisor
    ☐ Yelp  ☐ Pinterest  ☐ Google+  ☐ Others

13. What percentage of your sales comes from social media (Facebook, Twitter, Linked-In, YouTube, TripAdvisor, Yelp, Pinterest, Google+)?
    ☐ 0  ☐ 1-10  ☐ 11-20  ☐ 21-30  ☐ 31-40  ☐ Over 40

14. Of these social media platforms which one generates the most revenue in your B&B?
    ☐ Facebook  ☐ Twitter  ☐ Linked-In  ☐ YouTube  ☐ TripAdvisor
    ☐ Yelp  ☐ Pinterest  ☐ Google+  ☐ Others