

INFLUENCE OF SOCIAL MEDIA ON THE MARKETING OF OBUDU MOUNTAIN RESORT, CROSS RIVER STATE

***Okpaleke, V.C. & Chinwekpe, C.V.**

Department of Hospitality Management and Tourism,
Michael Okpara University of Agriculture,
Umudike, Abia State.

*Corresponding Author: okpalekev.c@mouau.edu.ng

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Anyanwu, K.U.

Department of Hospitality and Tourism Management,
Faculty of Business Science,
Imo State University, Owerri.

Abstract

This research investigated the influence of social media on the marketing of Obudu Mountain Resort. The objective of the study is to determine the extent of awareness about Obudu Mountain Resort through social media and to ascertain the influence of Social Networks (Facebook, Snapchat, Instagram, WhatsApp and Twitter) on the marketing of the Resort. The research adopted a survey method, and questionnaire was used to determine the influence of social media on the marketing of the Resort. One hundred and forty-eight (148) respondents (tourists who visited the study area) were conveniently selected. Data was collected through self-administered questionnaire and analyzed with simple descriptive statistics of frequency, percentages and mean distribution. It was found out that one hundred (100) respondents out of one hundred and forty-eight knew about Obudu Mountain Resort through social media platforms and that social network had an influence in the marketing of the Resort with a grand mean score of 3.6. The paper concludes that social media has a big influence on the marketing of Obudu Mountain and should be encouraged by the government and other tourism stakeholders.

Keywords: social media, marketing, social networks and Obudu Mountain Resort

Introduction

The Internet has revolutionized communication, allowing individuals and organizations to overcome geographical and time constraints, which in turn allows consumers and companies to connect around the world at any time (Harris & Rae, 2009). Online communities allow people to gather together on the Internet for various reasons, including searching for and sharing information, discussing communal issues, and making inquiries (Wang & Fesenmaier, 2004). With rapid changes in information technology, these online activities are now performed via a new form of communication technology known as Web 2.0 or social media (Gretzel, Kang & Lee, 2008). Social media is defined as a second generation of web development and design that aims to facilitate communication, secure information sharing, interoperability, and

collaboration on the World Wide Web. There are numerous social media sites such as Facebook, LinkedIn, and Twitter (Lim, 2010). In 2010, Facebook announced it had over 500 million users, while Twitter reported 75 million users (Jowyang, 2010). On average, consumers spend more than 5.5 hours per day on social media websites (Nelsonwire, 2010). With their increasing use, these sites are tools for creating online communities of users who share interests, activities, and objectives.

The revolutionary developments in Information Technology, which have been experienced through the proliferation of the Internet and the World Wide Web since 1990, illustrate the fact that tourists increasingly rely on the Internet for travel information as well as tourism products available in a given destination (Okonkwo, 2016). Tourism platforms increasingly get to the Internet nowadays which is vitally important because tourism is an information-based and information-intensive industry. Social media sites in the internet today are used more frequently than the physical participation of individuals in communication. Some of the popular social media sites are the Facebook, Twitter, Linked-in, Instagram, Snapchat and YouTube. It is important to note that the communications in the virtual world are very rapid and news spread faster than in any other form of communication over the internet.

It is no longer necessary for the individuals to wait to interact physically to be able to understand the actual situation of a destination that they wish to travel to for the purpose of tourism. It is now possible through the social media sites to be able to get e-word of mouth references. It is also possible to have access to the visual impact of the destination on the social media sites and the internet sites. This makes taking a decision easier and it also supports the decision-making process as to which is the best offer for the travel to a particular destination. The conventional methods of advertising are no longer practical (Juman, 2012). In order to be successfully promoted in the targeted markets, a destination must be favourably differentiated from its competitors. The development of information and communication technologies and their increasing use has radically changed the relationship between the destinations and their visitors. The growing role of social media in tourism is undeniable, leveraging off social media to market destinations has proven to be an excellent strategy (Királ'ová & Pavlíčka, 2015).

Okpoko and Okonkwo (2005) stated that the influence of social media marketing on Obudu Mountain Resort and the Nigeria tourism industry at large cannot be over-emphasized because communication in Nigeria has evolved over the last four decades. The evolution moved from the postal services and fixed telephone lines of the Post and Telecommunication Division (PT) and the Nigeria External Telecommunication (NET) of the 1970s, to the integration of radio and optic fiber technology in Nigerian Telecommunications Limited (NITEL) system of the 1980s, to the era of internet cafes and Instant Messaging (IM) on platforms like Yahoo, AOL and MSN of the 1990s. By the early 2000's, Nigeria, along with the rest of the

developed world, had its own little hut in the global web village. Nigerians were able to easily establish connections with the outside world, in areas of business and academia, as well as on the social platforms of the era of chat rooms.

As Facebook, Twitter, and other social network platforms continue to transform the internet landscape, businesses are looking for ways to use these tools to reach consumers. Social media marketing can truly transform a company's ability to interact and engage with its target audience, and it is amazing how accessible the tools are to business owners. Because Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube accounts are free, one does not even have to pay for the opportunity to build a solid web presence for any business, which is an advantage of social media marketing to tourism (Mangold & Faulds, 2009). Obudu Mountain Resort has experienced increased tourists visit and patronage, and the host community who are mainly farmers and hunters are apparently becoming more interested in tourism related activities (Nwahia, Omonona, Onyeabor & Balogun, 2012) in Onyeabor and Nwahia (2020). The social media effects on tourism with reference to Obudu Mountain Resort are profound and can be contributed to the popularity of user written reviews, video and photo sharing, blogging, and the localization of the Internet.

Cross River State's tourism potential has been underdeveloped as there are relatively large number of sites which have not been visited due to inadequate or lack of promotion. As such, these sites are not generating sufficient revenue for the state. In as much as the products, price and distribution are in order, the promotional strategies pose a challenge, hence, the need for the appraisal of a promotional strategy whose reach extends to the international or global community, and that is social media marketing. According to Safko (2010), many marketers still have the view that social media is a set of strange and foreign technologies that they may or may not use to market their services. The use of social media is at its infancy in most industries. Recent research indicated that the opportunities in the tourism industry are so numerous but are not yet fully exploited and more marketing is needed to create more awareness. An information gap exists in the tourism industry in Nigeria concerning the role of social media marketing in promoting destination.

Social media can be seen as something positive for the tourism industry as it has so much to offer. It allows destinations to contact visitors at relatively low cost and higher levels of efficiency that can be achieved with more traditional communication tools (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010) in Királová and Pavlíčka (2015). The industry is still on the rise and provides means to increase profit on investment. Nevertheless, one of the problems that service providers have encountered is how to engage in social media marketing and how to validate whether it is profitable for their business to use or not. Therefore, some of the most challenging aspects include the considerations of how one measures these results; how one determines the business value of social media, how one realizes the importance of social media marketing to

any organization, how one makes use of social media for a business in order for it to be accepted by the community whilst enhancing the brand and lastly, how one measures the value of the accomplished efforts (Mangold & Faulds, 2009). The last decade has seen a significant increase in the use of both social media and the general development of new technology worldwide. According to a report in Statista.com, there are over 2.41 billion monthly active Facebook users worldwide, which is about 17% increase per year. As of April 2019, Twitter had 330 million users while WhatsApp had 1.6 billion users. In June same year, Facebook had 2.41 billion users, Instagram 1 billion plus users while Snapchat had 2 million users.

The tourism industry has seen an impressive development since the beginning. However, there has been a decline in the rate of vacations and sales due to ineffective promotion of the tour products, further leading to lower revenue, lower payoffs and decreasing work segment in the tourism industry. This can be solved through the use of social media in marketing.

Objectives of the Study

The overall objective of this study is to determine the influence of social media on the marketing of Obudu Mountain Resort in Cross River State, Nigeria. The specific objectives are:

- i. To determine the extent of awareness about Obudu Mountain Resort through social media.
- ii. To determine the influence of social networks (Facebook, Snapchat, Instagram, WhatsApp and Twitter) on the marketing of Obudu Mountain Resort.

Research Questions

- i. To what extent are tourists aware of Obudu Mountain Resort through social media?
- ii. What is the influence of social networks (Facebook, Snapchat, Instagram, WhatsApp and Twitter) on the marketing of Obudu Mountain Resort?

Methodology

Research Design

The study adopted a survey measure where questionnaire was used to determine the influence of social media to the tourists' trip to Obudu Mountain Resort.

Area of the Study

The study was conducted in Obudu Mountain Resort formally known as Obudu Cattle Ranch in Cross River State. The resort is found on the Obudu Plateau, close to the Cameroon border in the northeastern part of Cross River State, approximately 110 kilometers (68 mi) east of the town of Ogoja and 65

kilometers (40 mi) from the town of Obudu in Obanliku Local Government Area of Cross River State. It is about 30minutes drive from Obudu town and is about a 332 kilometers (206 mi) drive from Calabar, the Cross River State capital. The climate of the Obudu Cattle Ranch is semi-temperate mountain climate, which is the general weather condition experienced on the Obudu Plateau due to its 1,600 meters (5,200 ft) elevation.

The resort was developed in 1951 by McCaughey, a Scottish who first explored the mountain ranges in 1949. He camped on the mountaintop of the Oshie Ridge on the Sankwala Mountains for a month before returning with Mr. Hugh Jones, a fellow rancher, in 1951. Together with Dr. Crawfield, they developed the Obudu Cattle Ranch. Since 2005, a cable car climbing 870 meters (2,850 ft) from the base to the top of the plateau gives visitors a scenic view while bypassing the extremely winding road to the top.

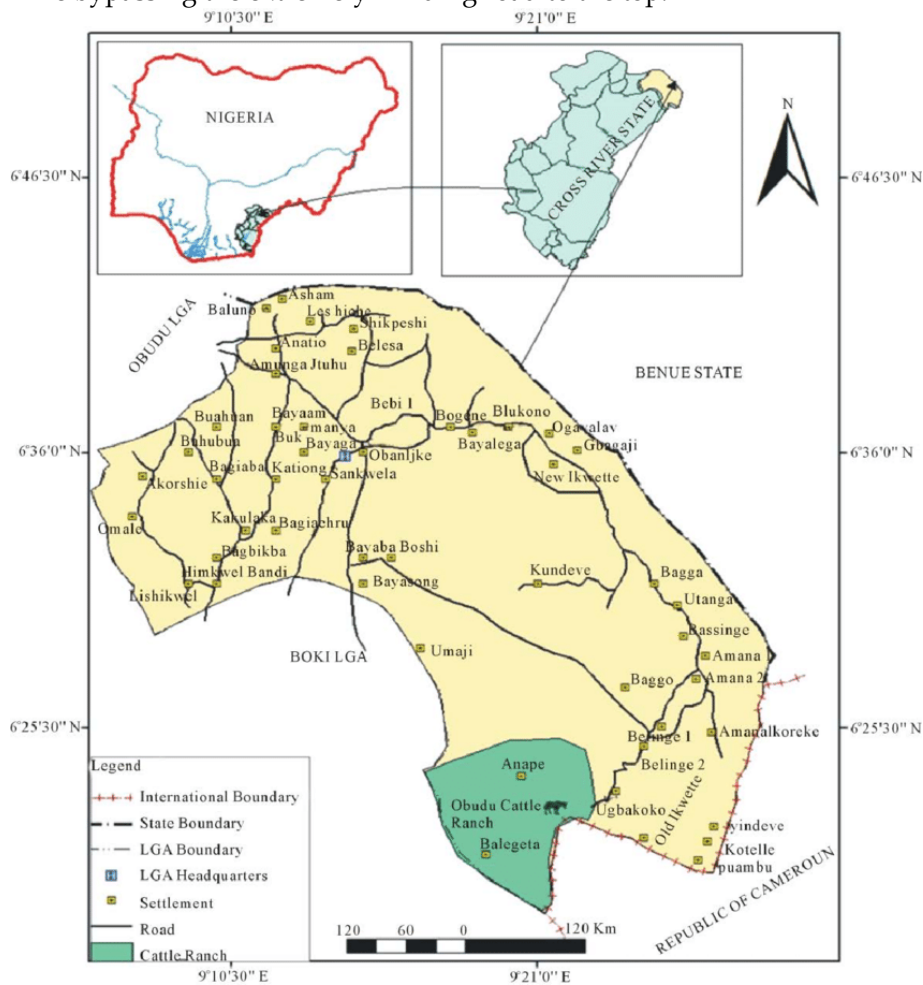


Figure 1: Map of Cross River State Showing Obudu Mountain Resort
Source: <https://www.researchgate.net/figure/Map-of-cross-river-state-showing-Obanliku-local-government-area>

Population, Sample Size and Sampling Technique

The population of the study was made up of all the tourists who visited the resort during the two-day period of this study amounting to one hundred and seventy-four (174) tourists. The sample size for the study consists of one hundred and forty-eight (148) respondents who were conveniently selected for the study. The 148 respondents represent the tourists that visited Obudu Mountain Resort during the two-day period of the study who agreed to take part in the study. The sampling technique used was non-probability convenient sampling.

Instrument for Data Collection

The instrument used in carrying out this study was questionnaire, primarily used to collect data from respondents which also form the basis of data presentation and analysis.

Validation/ Reliability of the Instrument

To ensure the validity of the instrument, it was forwarded to three experts in the field of hospitality and tourism management at Michael Okpara University of Agriculture, Umudike in Abia State. Cronbach's alpha reliability test was conducted and the coefficient of 0.86 showed the high reliability of the instrument.

Data Analysis Technique

The questionnaire was analyzed using a two-point scale of agree and disagree for research question one while the five-point Likert scale of Strongly Agree, Agree, Undecided, strongly disagree and Disagree was used for research question two. Simple descriptive statistics of percentages and frequency distribution were used to analyze the demographic data, frequency and percentages were used to analyze research question one, while mean distribution, frequency and percentages were used to analyze research question two. The average mean of these agreements for research question two was 3.0. Therefore, the response values with mean of 3.0 and above were accepted, while mean values below 3.0 were not accepted. The grand mean (clustered mean) was used to assess the overall contribution of social media on the marketing of Obudu Mountain Resort.

Results

Table 1: Demographic Characteristics of the Respondents

Parameter	Freq	%	Freq	%	Freq	%
Sex	Males 85	57%	Females 63	43%	148	100

Age						
18-25	46	31%	35	24%	81	55
26-50	31	21%	28	19%	59	40
50 and above	8	5%	-	-	8	5
Total	85	57%	63	43%	148	100
Nationality						
Local Travelers	74	50%	32	22%	106	72%
International Travelers	31	21%	11	7%	42	28%
Total	57	71%	43	29%	148	100%

Table 1 presents information on the demographic characteristics of the respondents. The results showed that 148 travelers comprising 85 males (57%) and 63 females (43%) participated in the study. 55% of the respondents (males 46, females 35) were aged 18-25 years, 40% aged 26-50 years (males 31, females 28) and 8% within 50 years and above. Data from nationality revealed that 72% of the respondents were local travelers (males 74, females 32), while 28% were international travelers (males 31, females 11).

Table 2: Extent of Awareness About Obudu Mountain Resort Through Social Media

Respondents that use social media tools to get Information about Obudu Mountain Resort						
SEX	MALE		FEMALE		TOTAL	
	Freq	%	Freq	%	Freq	%
Agree	57	39%	43	29%	100	68%
Disagree	28	19%	20	14%	48	32%
Total	85	57%	63	43%	148	100%

Results from Table 2 revealed that 48 respondents out of 148 did not use social media tools to get Information about Obudu Mountain Resort. Furthermore, these 48 respondents who indicated that they did not use social media tools were dropped on subsequent analysis. Research question two was

therefore analyzed using one hundred (100) respondents who indicated that they used social media tools to get Information about Obudu Mountain Resort.

Table 3: Influence of Social Network in the Marketing of Obudu Mountain Resort

SEX	MALE					FEMALE							
PARAMETER	S A	A	U	D	S D	SA	A	U	D	S D	Fre q	S c o r e	Remark s
Availability of information about O.M.R	40	10	0	5	2	11	25	0	7	0	100	4.2	Accepted
Positive Feedback about O.M.R	35	10	11	11	0	11	22	0	10	0	100	4	Accepted
Negative news about O.M.R	0	5	14	23	15	0	5	10	25	3	100	2.5	Not Accepted
Travel decision influenced by S.N Promotions and Feedback	10	35	0	12	0	15	20	0	3	5	100	3.8	Accepted
Grand Mean											100	3.6	Accepted

O.M.R- Obudu Mountain Resort, S.N- Social Network

SA=Strongly Agreed, A=Agreed, U=Undecided, D= Disagree, SD= Strongly disagree

Table 4: Distribution of Percentage on Influence of Social Network in the Marketing of Obudu Mountain Resort

PARAMETER	SA	A	U	D	SD	Total
Availability of information about O.M.R	51%	35%	0%	12%	2%	100
Positive Feedback about O.M.R	46%	30%	3%	21%	0%	100
Negative news about O.M.R	0%	10%	24%	48%	18%	100

Table 3 and 4 shows information on the influence of social network platforms such as Facebook, Snapchat, Instagram, WhatsApp and Twitter on the marketing of Obudu Mountain Resort. The result revealed that 51% of the respondents strongly agreed that there is information about Obudu Mountain Resort available on social network platforms. 35% of the respondents agreed that there is information about Obudu Mountain Resort available on social network platforms, 0% of the respondents were undecided on whether there is information about Obudu Mountain Resort on social media platforms or not. 12% of the respondents disagreed that there is information about Obudu Mountain Resort available on social network platforms, while 2% of the respondents strongly disagreed that there is information about Obudu Mountain Resort available on social network platforms, all with a mean score of 4.2, which is acceptable that social network has an influence in the marketing of Obudu Mountain Resort.

Table 3 and 4 also revealed that 46% of the respondents strongly agreed that there is positive feedback about Obudu Mountain Resort on social network platforms. 30% of the respondents agreed that there is positive feedback about Obudu Mountain Resort on social network platforms. 3% of the respondents were undecided on whether there is positive feedback about Obudu Mountain Resort on social network platforms or not. 21% of the respondents disagree that there is positive feedback about Obudu Mountain Resort on social network platforms. The table also revealed that 0% of the respondents strongly disagreed that there is positive feedback about Obudu Mountain Resort on social network platforms. All with a mean score of 4.0 which was accepted.

The tables further revealed that 0% of the respondents strongly agreed that there has been negative perception about Obudu Mountain Resort amongst customers on popular social network platforms. 10% of the respondents agreed and 24% of the respondents were undecided on whether there has been negative perception about Obudu Mountain Resort amongst customers on popular social network platforms. 48% of the respondents disagreed while 18% of the respondents strongly disagreed that there has been

negative perception about Obudu Mountain Resort amongst customers on popular social network platforms. All at a mean score of 2.5 and this was not accepted. Furthermore, 25% of the respondents strongly agreed that social network promotions and customer feedback influenced their decision to travel to Obudu Mountain Resort, while 55% of the respondents agreed. On the other hand, 15% disagreed, 5% strongly disagreed while 0% were undecided. All at a mean score of 3.8, which was accepted. Table 3 showed a grand mean of 3.6 which was accepted. This means that social network influences the marketing of Obudu Mountain Resort.

Discussion of Findings

An analysis of the demographic characteristics of the respondents that participated in the study revealed that majority of the respondents were male with a total percentage value of 57% as shown in table 1. It also showed that the majority is between the ages of 18-25 which is 48% of the total sample size and are more of local travellers (74%) than international travellers (26%).

Awareness of Obudu Mountain Resort on social media.

The first research question was to find out the level of awareness about Obudu Mountain Resort through social media. Result showed that one hundred (100) out of one hundred and forty-eight agreed that they got to know about Obudu Mountain Resort through social media with a percentage of 68%. The remaining 32% who were not aware of Obudu Mountain Resort through social media were dropped. This showed that majority of the visitors and tourists got information about Obudu Mountain Resort through social media. This implies that social media is vital in creating visibility for organizations. Failure to use social media in creating awareness may result to low patronage and lack of funds (Muobike, 2018). Internet and social media especially makes possible a fast connection to the source of information, raising user's awareness (Dina & Sabou, 2012).

Social Networks

The second research question was to find out the Influence of social networks in the marketing of Obudu Mountain Resort. From the analysis, it was observed that majority of the respondents strongly agreed and agreed that there is availability of information about Obudu Mountain Resort on social media platforms with a mean score rating of 4.2. An acceptable mean rating of 4.0 showed that there is positive feedback about Obudu Mountain Resort. On the other hand, there is no negative news about Obudu Mountain Resort as shown in the analysis with a 'not accepted' mean of 2.5 while travel decisions were influenced by social network promotions and feedback with an accepted mean of 3.8. A grand mean of 3.6 was accepted based on the overall influence of social networks on the marketing of Obudu Mountain Resort. This could be because today's social network platforms have large number of users worldwide. This shows the effectiveness of social media as a marketing tool

as confirmed by Madondo (2016) who examined the influence of social media in promoting the tourism industry in Durban, South Africa. The findings of the study revealed that social media is of paramount importance in promoting tourism and not just an optional extra. The study submits that social media is one of the most effective tools in promoting tourism.

Conclusion

It has been found out that social media plays a vital role in creating awareness about Obudu Mountain Resort and that social networks has a big influence in the marketing of Obudu Mountain Resort which must not be neglected. Tourism platforms increasingly get to the internet nowadays which is vitally important because tourism is an information-based and information-intensive industry. Social media sites in the internet are used more frequently than the physical participation of individuals in communication; its benefits cannot be over-emphasized therefore, Cross River State Government should ensure that their social media pages and handles such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, WhatsApp and YouTube are active, regularly updated and potential consumers' questions and complaints are quickly and aptly responded to so as to generate and maintain interest. This will ensure constant accessibility and induce interest in potential customers.

Depending on accessibility and knowledge, the state government should explore and use different options (websites, emails, web advertising) to contact former clients to keep them updated, communicate with travel agencies and publicize on different webpages, YouTube channels, among others. The services of social media experts who are very knowledgeable and skilled in search engine optimization and able to understand internet statistics should be employed to reveal changes in consumers' interest and help to generate a database of tourists. Further research can be carried out in the hospitality industry to determine how social media affects the marketing of hospitality establishments. A similar study should also be carried out in other tourist attractions in different states to find out the influence of social media on their marketing.

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