

The Effect of Customer Engagement in Social Media and Purchase Intention in The Malaysia Hotel Industry

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Abstract: *In recent years, the hospitality industry has overcome numerous challenges to engage customers in social media marketing. Greater interest in customer behaviour has led the hotel industry to engage in more social media marketing, resulting in purchase intent activities. Therefore, this study aims to identify the effect of customer engagement that influences customers' purchase intention in the hotel industry. Data were collected via self-administered questionnaires through invitations via email, WhatsApp, and social media platforms. A total of 326 respondents from Malaysia were selected through convenience sampling in this survey. Data were analysed using IBM SPSS Statistics software. The results discovered that surveillance, social interaction, information sharing, and attraction significantly impacted customer engagement and purchasing intention. This study contributes to the existing literature by providing insight into the importance of social media to hotel customers in Malaysia. Besides, this research can help the Malaysian government and hoteliers to integrate the research framework into their current business model and impose more effective strategies to engage customers in their social media marketing.*

Keywords: Surveillance, social interaction, sharing information, attraction, and purchase intention.

1. Introduction

Marketing is an important business tool. The American Marketing Association defines marketing as the process of conceptualising, pricing, promoting, and distributing ideas, goods, and services to achieve organisational goals, as supported by studies of Varadarajan, 2017; Leutz & Tadesse, 2017 and Torres et al., 2017; Price et al., 2017. Appel et al. (2020) and Dwivedi et al. (2021) reported that the Internet, social media, mobile apps, and other digital communications technologies have become ingrained in the daily lives of billions of people worldwide.

In recent years, there has been a significant expansion in social media marketing, with most people using platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram. According to Appel et al. (2020), Singh (2021), and Trad & Dabbagh (2020), social media is quickly becoming one of the technologies that will define our generation because it is used by billions of people all over the world. Companies use social media to interact with customers, raise brand awareness,

influence consumer attitudes, collect feedback, enhance existing products and services, and boost sales (Algharabat et al., 2020; Kapoor et al., 2018; Kaur et al., 2018; Lal et al., 2020). Combining social media marketing with search engines can increase organic website traffic, according to Ibrahim et al. (2018). Recently, social media marketing has become a global trend. Social media has become a tool for global marketing because it is easier to reach many potential customers. The business can quickly penetrate global markets by utilising social networking sites. Social media has become an integral part of many people's lives around the globe (Dwivedi et al., 2021; Appel et al., 2019). According to Garg et al. (2021), the Internet enables people to communicate and exchange resources quickly and easily from any location.

The study will focus on how social media marketing in hotel management. However, there is a certainty that hotel customers engage in social media marketing, and research on this subject is limited. Hence, future research is expected to unveil the relationship between customer engagement behaviour towards social media marketing and hotel purchase intention with precision and more prominent assurance. Thus, this study will undertake further investigations by using customers with a wide range of characteristics for more accurate and specified results to obtain more specified results. Eventually, this study will investigate the relationship between surveillance, social interaction, information sharing, attraction, and purchase intention in choosing a hotel in Malaysia.

2. Literature Review

Numerous social media platforms have made social media marketing a worldwide phenomenon. Malaysia has also embraced social media as a marketing tool. In Malaysia, social media is one of the most important marketing tools. According to Ng & Wah (2022), it is more convenient for large corporations selling their products in Malaysia to reach their target market through social media. Many people spend much of their time on social media. As of January 2021, approximately 86% of Malaysians were active social media users (Yaacob et al., 2021; Azmi & Rahman, 2022).

Purchase intention refers to an individual's plan or decision to acquire a particular good or service (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975). Husnain & Toor (2017) discovered, in the context of social network marketing, that customer engagement, facilitated by connection, communication, and exchange of product-related information, significantly influences purchase intent. This discovery emphasises how increasing customer engagement can result in a greater intent to purchase. In marketing, advertising, and sales, purchase intention occurs when a consumer strongly intends to purchase a particular product or brand (Kim & Park, 2023; Weismueller et al., 2020; Tariq et al., 2017).

This study employs Katz & Blumler's (1974) Uses and Gratification Theory (UGT). Harun & Husin, 2019 and Husin, 2019 stated that the UGT is a sociological influence on how and why individuals actively seek out particular social media to satisfy particular needs. Figure 1 shows the research framework of the study based on the Uses and Gratification Theory (UGT). In terms of marketing context, UGT theory has widely been used to describe customers' purchase intentions (Mutiarra et al., 2023; Kaur et al., 2020; Harun & Husin, 2019; Yong & Lian, 2018).

Based on the literature, this study will examine respondents' purchase intention to visit a hotel by assessing the effects of four variables: surveillance, social, information sharing, and attraction. The study will determine the relationship between the independent variables

(surveillance, social, information sharing, and attraction) with the dependent (customer purchase intention) variable. The study also examines the effect of the mediation variables (customer engagement), also known as mediators, on customers' purchase intention in the hotel industry.

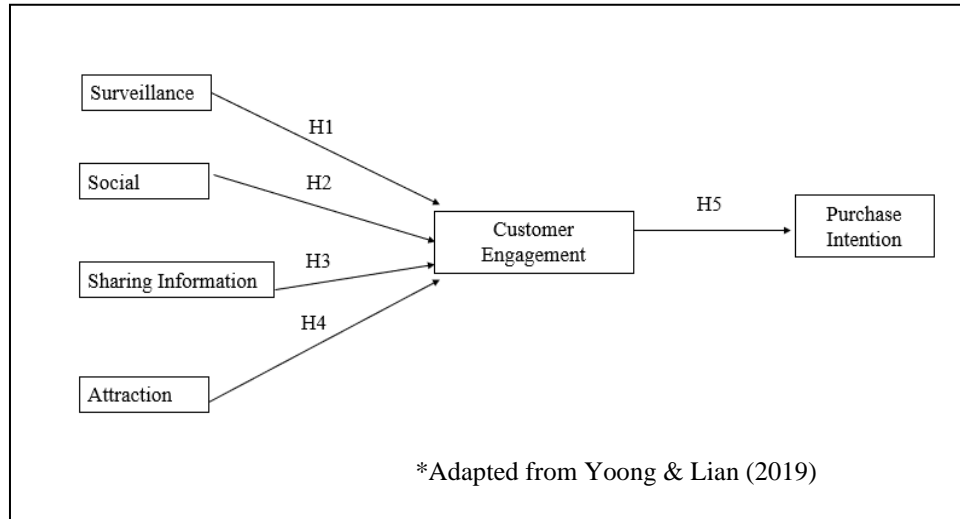


Figure 1: Research Framework

3. Hypothesis Development

Based on the research framework shown in Figure 1, five (5) hypotheses were developed.

3.1 The Relationship between Surveillance and Customer Engagement

Social media users have played significant roles in acquiring information and educating themselves, also known as surveillance. (Yoong & Lian, 2019). Surveillance influences customers' engagement in choosing a hotel (Ruckenstein & Granroth, 2019; Al Ghizzawi, 2019; Yoong & Lian, 2018). Yoong & Lian, 2019 stated that surveillance was an exact indicator of customer engagement in the hotel industry. Hence, the following hypothesis has been formulated:

H1 Surveillance has a positive influence on customer engagement in the hotel's social media.

3.2 The Relationship between Social Interaction and Customer Engagement

Social interaction has a greater influence on customer engagement in hotels' social media (De Silva, 2020; Whiting & William, 2013) because the term "social interaction" refers to the motivation that encourages users of social media platforms to communicate and interact with other people. Yoong & Lian, 2019 stated that social interaction was an exact indicator of customer engagement in a hotel's social media marketing. Hence, the following hypothesis has been formulated:

H2 Social interaction has a positive influence on customer engagement in the hotel's social media.

3.3 The Relationship between Information Sharing and Customer Engagement

Information sharing has a greater influence on customer engagement in a hotel's social media (Chu & Cheng, 2020; Kucukusta & Lam, 2019; Ma et al., 2014). Social media sites facilitate

information sharing between users and between users and the company (Yoong & Lian, 2019). The role of information sharing on social media sites has increased customer engagement and is a clear indicator of customer engagement in a hotel's social media marketing. Hence, the following hypothesis has been formulated:

H3 Information sharing has a positive influence on customer engagement in the hotel's social media.

3.4 The Relationship between Attraction and Customer Engagement

Attraction has a greater influence on customers' intention to choose a hotel (Demmers et al., 2020; Lee et al., 2020; Sreejesh et al., 2020). The richness of a brand post's standard features is referred to as its attraction on social media pages. (Yong & Lian, 2019; Yong & Lian, 2018; De Vries et al. 2012). Yoong & Lian, 2019 stated that social interaction was an exact indicator of customer engagement in a hotel's social media marketing. Hence, the following hypothesis has been formulated:

H4 Attraction has a positive influence on customer engagement in the hotel's social media.

3.5 The Relationship between Customer Engagement and Purchase Intention

Customer engagement has a greater influence on customers' purchase intention in choosing a hotel (Giombi et al., 2022; Izogo & Mppinganjira, 2022; So et al., 2021). A study by Yong & Lian, 2019 and Vivek et al. (2012) stated that customer engagement is the level of individual involvement and connection with the organisation's offers and activities that are started either by the customer or the organisation. Yoong & Lian, 2019 stated that customer engagement was an exact indicator of customer purchase intention in the hotel industry. Hence, the following hypothesis has been formulated:

H5 Customer engagement has a positive influence on customer purchase intention in the hotel industry.

4. Methodology

This study is descriptive because the research design is based on a clear problem statement and specific hypotheses to investigate the related variables. In addition, regression analysis was utilised for testing hypotheses. The unit of analysis for this study is an individual, or in this case, travellers. The questionnaire is intended to collect information from respondents. A Google form has been established as an online data collection survey instrument. Some respondents were invited to participate in the survey via email, Instagram, WhatsApp, and even the Telegram application.

The population in this study were individuals aged 18 and above, staying in Malaysia and having an Instagram account. This research uses Instagram as the target social media platform because it is one of the biggest social media platforms people commonly use to share their experiences, as Friandi et al. (2021) reported. The survey questionnaire used was administered to a convenience sample of 326 customers from Malaysia. Before the actual survey, a pilot test was conducted to test the survey questionnaire on 30 respondents.

The present research questionnaire used both a nominal scale and a five-point Likert scale. The nominal scale is used in Section A to collect respondents' demographic profiles. In contrast,

the five-point Likert scale is applied from Section B to Section E to collect the data related to the independent and dependent variables. The scale measured surveillance, social interaction, information sharing, attraction, customer engagement, and purchase intention.

5. Results and Analysis

Version 22 of IBM SPSS Statistics was utilised for data analysis. Through descriptive analysis, researchers can compile respondents' demographic profiles, the number of valid samples, the minimum and maximum value, the mean and standard deviation of variables, and the acceptable response rate. If necessary, factor analysis was used to test the validity of the data and eliminate duplication and redundancy in the sets of correlated variables. The value of KMO and Bartlett was used to validate data. With the purpose of examine the consistency and dependability of the questionnaires, a reliability analysis was conducted using Cronbach's Alpha. Finally, a regression analysis examined the relationship between the independent and dependent variables.

5.1 Demographic Profile

Table 1 shows the total of 326 respondents, where most respondents are female (52.8%) and followed by male (47.2%). Most respondents are aged 21-30 years old, with 85.5%. As for the respondents' race, most respondents are Malay, with 90.8 %, and the lowest is Indian, with 0.9%. For education level, 69.9% of respondents possess a degree, while only 1.2% possess a master's degree. Lastly, regarding monthly income, the highest number of respondents, 55.8%, have no income, while 2.8% have an income of more than RM4851 per month.

Table 1: Demographic Profile of Respondents

Variable	Categories	Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	154	47.2
	Female	172	52.8
Age	Less than 20	8	2.5
	21-30	285	85.5
	31-40	11	3.4
	41-50	21	11.4
	More than 50	1	0.3
Race	Malay	296	90.8
	Chinese	25	7.7
	Indian	3	0.9
	Others	2	0.6
Education Level	Diploma	85	26.1
	Degree	228	69.9
	Master	4	1.2
	Others	9	2.8
Monthly Income	No income	185	55.8
	Less than RM4850	135	41.4
	More than RM4851	9	2.8

5.2 Goodness of Data

Table 2 indicates that all independent and dependent variables have KMO values greater than 0.5, indicating sufficient intercorrelations. The independent variable (0.821) scored the highest KMO value, followed by the dependent variable (0.753).

Table 3: KMO and Bartlett's Test

Variables	KMO	Bartlett's Test of Sphericity
Independent	0.821	$\chi^2=1995.12$; $p=0.000$
Dependent	0.753	$\chi^2=291.45$; $p=0.000$

5.3 Descriptive Analysis

The descriptive analysis of each variable's mean and standard deviation is presented in the following tables, along with the questions from the questionnaires. For surveillance and social interaction factors, the survey includes a total of five questions for each category. For other variables, such as information sharing and attraction, respondents are required to answer four questions during the survey.

From Table 3, the highest mean score is from surveillance (*I found some helpful advice on hotel services in the hotel's social media*) with 4.16. Meanwhile, the lowest mean score, 3.73, is from social interaction (*I found that the hotel's social media made it possible for me to easily interact with other hotel guests*).

Table 3: Descriptive Analysis

No	Items	Mean (M)	Std. Deviation (SD)
Surveillance			
1.	I found some helpful advice on hotel services on the hotel's social media.	4.16	0.79
2.	I found the hotel's social media is coping with the most recent information.	3.96	0.78
3.	I figured there is customised information search available in the hotel's social media.	3.98	0.75
4.	I can understand the most recent important information about the hotel on their social media.	3.97	0.80
5.	I found that the hotel's social media helps me to learn interesting services.	3.99	0.75
Social Interaction			
1.	I figured that there is a possibility of getting to know other customers.	3.74	0.90
2.	I found that hotel providers replied to customer posts/feedback/comments/inquiries from customers.	3.83	0.90
3.	I found that the hotel's social media made it possible for me to easily interact with other hotel guests.	3.73	0.92
4.	I found that the hotel's social media enabled opinion exchange with others on hotel services.	3.83	0.82
5.	I found that the hotel's social media easily connected me with friends/others quickly.	3.85	0.86
Sharing Information			
1.	I found that messages are updated/posted by the hotel on a regular schedule.	3.83	0.82
2.	I found it simple to disclose information to others through the hotel's social media.	3.84	0.83
3.	I think the latest hotel sales promotion information has been provided on the hotel's social media.	4.02	0.75
4.	I found quick access to information on the hotel's social media.	3.97	0.78

	Attraction		
1.	I found the hotel's social media content is useful.	3.99	0.77
2.	I found active-functioning links in the hotel's social media.	3.99	0.75
3.	I found the hotel's social media visual content interesting.	4.03	0.74
4.	I found that the hotel's social media video content is attractive.	3.96	0.79

5.4 Hypotheses Testing

The researcher used regression analysis to see if the proposed hypotheses significantly affected the tested variables. The regression analysis results are shown in Table 5. According to the findings, surveillance, social interaction, information sharing, and attraction positively influence hotel customers' purchase intentions.

Table 5. Regression Analysis Results of Tested Hypothesis

Hypothesis	t -Value	p- Value	Remarks
H1- Surveillance has a positive influence on customer engagement in the hotel's social media.	2.511**	0.013	ACCEPTED
H2-Social interaction has a positive influence on customer engagement in the hotel's social media.	3.894**	0.028	ACCEPTED
H3-Sharing information has a positive influence on customer engagement in the hotel's social media.	3.017**	0.030	ACCEPTED
H4-Attraction has a positive influence on customers engagement in the hotel's social media.	3.221**	0.001	ACCEPTED
H5-Customer engagement has a positive influence on customer purchase intention in hotels.	3.125**	0.006	ACCEPTED

Note: * - $p < 0.05$

6. Discussions

Hypothesis 1 (H1) has suggested a positive relationship between surveillance and customer engagement in hotel social media. Nevertheless, the tested hypotheses showed it has a t-value of 2.511 and $\beta=0.013$. It showed that surveillance positively affects customer engagement in the hotel's social media. This outcome was steady with the discoveries from Yoong & Lian, 2018. The result revealed that the customer's decision to purchase hotel products or services is highly correlated with the view of their preference in the social media advertising of the hotel.

Hypothesis 2 (H2) has proposed that there is a positive relationship between social interaction and customer engagement in hotel social media. The result of the hypothesis was supported as the tested hypotheses showed it has a t-value of 3.894 and $\beta=0.0280$. This study revealed that, indeed, there is a positive relationship between social interaction and customer engagement. In alignment with past studies by Li et al., 2022, the study suggests that when social interaction is positive, there is customer engagement in the hotel's social media. Similarly, Yoong & Lian, 2019 also showed a significant relationship between social interaction and customer engagement.

Hypothesis 3 (H3) has proposed that there is a positive relationship between sharing information and customer engagement in a hotel's social media. The result of the hypothesis was supported as the tested hypotheses showed it has a t-value of 3.017 and $\beta=0.030$, which indicates that information sharing is positively related to customer engagement in the hotel's social media. This finding is consistent with the paper by Yoong & Lian (2019), stating that an individual tends to have a positive engagement when social media have good information sharing.

Hypothesis 4 (H4) has suggested a positive relationship between attraction and customer engagement in the hotel's social media, indicated through tested hypotheses, which showed a t-value of 3.221 and $\beta=0.001$. The tested result aligned with the past literature, which discovered a positive relationship between attraction and customer engagement toward purchase intention among hotel customers (Voorveld, Noort, Muntinga, & Bronner, 2018).

According to Hypothesis 5 (H5), customer engagement influences the intention to purchase hotel products and services, demonstrated by tested hypotheses with t-values of 3.125 and $\beta=0.006$. As a result, the hypotheses supported the idea that customer engagement moderates the effect of purchase intention. This hypothesis was supported by Lee et al., 2020; Yoong & Lian, 2019 and Phuong & Vinh, 2020 literature, which stated that when customers engage with the factors that affect social media marketing, they are more likely to purchase hotel products and services.

7. Recommendation and Future Research

By incorporating all the suggested variables and theories, this study aims to pinpoint the effect of social media marketing on consumers' intentions to purchase hotel goods or services in Malaysia. There were some restrictions on this specific study. First, since this study only focused on planned visits rather than actual ones, it is reasonable to say that intention may not translate into behaviour in this case. Another drawback of this study was an inequitable distribution of respondents between Malaysians and non-Malaysians. As a result, there was a significant difference between respondents who were Malaysian and those who were not.

Future research could investigate the effect of social media participation on other consumers' purchases, emphasising post-purchase behavior, such as purchase behavior, willingness to purchase once more, or loyalty. We used a quantitative approach in this study. Alternatively, we recommend analysing the data using the qualitative method to provide further valuable insight into the subject matter.

8. Conclusion

The outcome of this study revealed that all the variables have significantly influenced customers' engagement in the purchase intention of hotel products and services. Thus, hoteliers must develop a more effective strategy to enhance their social media marketing to promote and encourage more visitors. It is the responsibility of the government of Malaysia and the country's hoteliers to incorporate the research framework into their existing business models and to implement more effective strategies to engage customers in social media marketing. Since this study focused mainly on Malaysia, the insights of this study need to be used to increase other considerations toward more sustainable marketing, especially in the hospitality industry. The outcome of this study discovered that customers' engagement in hotel social media marketing is highly correlated with their intention to purchase, and more people are aware of the importance of excellent social media marketing.

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