



Analysing the use of integrated marketing communication at the View Boutique Hotel in Johannesburg, South Africa

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Abstract

Integrated marketing communication (IMC) is an instrument whereby organisations can create and nurture stakeholder relationships. The aim of this study was to analyse the use of IMC by the View Boutique Hotel in Johannesburg, South Africa. To analyse the IMC at the hotel, in-depth interviews were conducted with both marketing employees and guests. In the aspect of planned messages, the outcome of the study revealed that the hotel uses marketing communication tools on a limited scale and that to ensure message consistency the manager handles all external communication activities. The study concluded that ensuring message consistency should be the responsibility of everyone employed in the hotel. With regard to the product messages, the study showed that guests were negatively disposed towards the food, beverages, entertainment and recreation offered by the hotel. However, the service messages of the study indicated that the hotel's service quality was good and that the employees were responsive to the needs of the guests. In respect of unplanned messages, the study showed that the hotel was receiving limited coverage from the media and that word-of-mouth communication was an effective tool in the hotel's communication toolbox. On the whole, it may therefore be said that the study underscores the centrality of IMC as an instrument for creating and nurturing the relations between the hotel and its guests. It is anticipated that the outcome of this study could provide hotels such as the View Boutique Hotel with guidance in regard to utilising IMC to its full potential to make sure that there is message consistency and also to optimise communication impact.

Keywords: Marketing communication, Integrated marketing communication, boutique hotel, message consistency, relationship marketing.

Introduction

With the various communication challenges confronting the hotel industry in South Africa and beyond, there is an urgent need for hotels to disseminate consistent messages to their various target customers, using diverse channels to assess an unlimited audience and to create awareness of their products and service offering. Through a well-planned integrated marketing communications (IMC) campaign, hotels are able to have an edge over their competitors from the customers' perspective. The onus lies with the hotel's communication team to see to it that they convey consistent messages on a regular basis to the target audience. This can be accomplished by emphasising the advantages, the positive or strong selling points of differentiation, and creating synergy when communicating with the target audience. This initiative will ultimately guarantee that the hotel establishes meaningful relationships with its customers and achieves a competitive advantage (Lal, Quelch & Rangan, 2005:261).The



subsequent part of this article commences by stating the research problem. This is followed by a literature review and a discussion of the research methodology. The findings, implications and a conclusion are also provided.

Problem statement

Many research studies have been conducted on marketing communication in the hospitality industry. Some of the research pertinent to this topic includes the perception of social media as a marketing communication tool in star-graded accommodation establishments in the Western Cape of South Africa by authors such as (Nieker, 2012). Tsaha (2009) conducted an evaluation of the marketing communication methods used by selected tourism operators with reference to bed and breakfast establishments in Cape Town. Van der Merwe (2004) investigated the marketing communication methods used by tour operators in Gauteng, while Siedle (1978) conducted a study of the marketing strategies of two random hotels, namely, Lanzerac and Matjiesfontein. Previous studies in the field of IMC have focused on the larger categories of hotels, for example an explanatory study carried out by Petzer, Steyn and Mostert (2008), entitled “Competitive marketing strategies of selected hotels: an exploratory study” and “IMC and Tourism: a case study of Icehotel AB” conducted by Tornberg (2003). Studies on IMC have been carried out in larger, well-established hotels but have not been done in a 5-star rated boutique hotel.

When this study was conducted, a few studies in the field of IMC on boutique hotels with a 5-star rating had been conducted in South Africa, but not in Johannesburg. Accordingly, this was the first study of this nature to be conducted on the View Boutique Hotel, a boutique hotel with a 5-star rating . Given the paucity of research evidence on IMC within boutique hotels, this study analyses the IMC used by the View Boutique Hotel to combat communication challenges. According to Sangaworn and Mujtaba (2015:3), the majority of service industries such as hotels are confronted with marketing challenges. These have to be dealt with by finding methods to retain their current customers and upgrade their offering, making it more tangible to potential customers. In the light of the paucity of the research evidence on IMC within the hotel context, the study sought to analyse IMC at the View Boutique Hotel. This hotel is situated in a tranquil area in the historic, leafy suburb of Auckland Park, a suburb in Johannesburg in South Africa. This section discusses the research problem, while the next section will look into IMC and provide a definition of the concept.

Integrated marketing communication

Duncan (2002) defines IMC as a “cross-functional process for creating and nourishing profitable relationships with customers and other stakeholders by strategically controlling or influencing all messages sent to these groups and encouraging data-driven, purposeful dialogue”. Duncan’s definition of IMC (2002) stresses the importance of branding and the relationship between an organisation and its customers in driving brand value. This definition describes IMC as a practice that involves the managing of consumer’s relationships that enhance brand value. More precisely, IMC is a multifaceted process that can be used to create and hopefully nurture profitable relationships with consumers and other stakeholders by strategically guiding or swaying all messages directed to these groups and encouraging data-driven, purposeful dialogue with them. Thus, this definition emphasises the importance of establishing relationships with all stakeholders as they are pivotal in creating brand value. However, there is a noticeable shift away from ordinary attitudes to a behavioural change or response, where IMC is seen as being able to create and nurture profitable relationships. This definition has also highlighted the expansion of the concept of the target market to include the various stakeholders such as customers and noncustomer stakeholders who deal directly with



the organisation. Thus, sustainable customer relationships rather than creating short-term relationships are seen as important. Moreover, the definition suggests that there are messages that may be controlled (planned) and messages that cannot be controlled (unplanned, product, and service messages). Having explained the definition of IMC used for this study, the next section is about the IMC message typology.

IMC message typology

In line with Duncan and Moriarty's 1998 definition, IMC involves controlling (planned) or influencing (product, service and unplanned) messages to and from stakeholders. Brunello (2013:9–10) states that organisations cannot be viewed as authentic players if there is either a lack of or no consistency between messages and words. In line with Duncan and Moriarty's (1998) definition, IMC involves controlling (planned) or influencing (product, service and unplanned) messages to and from stakeholders.

Planned messages

According to Grönroos (2007:305), planned messages may be described as messages that are conveyed through a planned marketing communication strategy. Duncan and Moriarty (1997:78) explain that planned messages can be used to enlighten and convince customers to purchase an organisation's product offering. However, in view of the fact that planned messages originate from within the organisation, they tend to be perceived as not credible by customer and noncustomer stakeholders because they are considered to be biased. Planned messages consist of the traditional elements of the marketing communication mix, such as advertising, sales promotions, sponsorships, public relations, and personal selling Duncan and Moriarty (1997:78).

Product messages

Product messages from the customers cannot be controlled but can only be influenced by the organisation and, as such, are very potent owing to their persuasive nature. According to Arens (2006:246), these types of messages communicate the details of the product to a large extent through the use of certain physical attributes such as the use of colour, type fonts, layout, imagery and design that are present in the hotel.

Service messages

Service messages emanate from the familiarity that comes with dealing with an organisation, its employees, agents and products. Service messages include the behaviour of the employees of the organisation, the services provided, which include the systems and technology used are in line with the organisation's objectives to send out appropriate message about the organisation to its relevant audiences. Yang (2015:77) asserts that employee behaviour may influence customer satisfaction and, thus, may result in a customer or guest making a repeat visit to the hotel. This means that the hotel will be able to retain its customers. Accordingly, empowering employees may help to enhance employee satisfaction and boost morale which, ultimately inspires employees to serve their customers better. Empowerment may also impact positively on employees' willingness to deliver a high level of service and help to reduce labour costs as well as improve productivity (Krujah, Ha, Drishti & Oelfka, 2016:27–28).



Unplanned messages

Unplanned messages are disseminated through the use of informal channels such as, company gossip, news stories, grapevine, research findings, rumours, grapevine and word of mouth and cannot be controlled but can be influenced by the organisation (Angelopulo & Barker, 2013:45; Duncan and Moriarty. 1997:88). Unplanned message may affect customer attitude. For example, if a visitor says bad things about the View Boutique Hotel to a friend, the latter may develop a negative attitude towards the hotel. However, to contain this issue, the hotel may be able to influence unplanned messages of the hotel, devising proactive ways in which to improve the hotel's service quality (Arens, 2006:246) .The next section discusses the research methodology.

Research methodology

This study adopted a qualitative research method. This method was chosen because it focuses on knowing “the processes and the social and cultural contexts which shape various behavioural patterns” (Wagner, Kawulich & Garner, 2012:126). The study sought to analyse IMC at the View Boutique Hotel. A permission letter was sought from the hotel management to conduct the study. The principal aspects of ethical research were taken into account both before and during the study. Aspects such as the informed consent of the participants and confidentiality were adhered to by the researcher. The researcher also applied for and obtained an ethical clearance certificate. The format of the study was cross-sectional using in-depth interviews and observation. Secondary information was sourced from marketing textbooks, marketing journals and the internet. The target population for the study included guests of the View Boutique Hotel. The researcher's personal contacts included the manager and some of the front office staff of the hotel. Primary information was collected by conducting in-depth interviews using an interview guide developed for the study. This procedure entailed conducting face-to-face interviews with the participants at the hotel's premises. On average each interview lasted for about 20 minutes. The selected sample size for the study was a total of 30 participants, three of whom were marketing staff members of the hotel and 27 were guests at the hotel. This method was selected because it was deemed to be both convenient and cost effective. The interview conversations were recorded. Face-to-face interviews were conducted as this enabled the researcher both to have a close encounter with the participants and to be able to observe them personally in terms of their body language, attitudes, facial expressions and behavioural patterns. A definite advantage of qualitative research is the depth of exploration it allows as well as the richly descriptive data it yields (Wagner et al., 2012:126). The participants' responses were recorded, and field notes were made for the purposes of transcription. Thematic analysis was used to analyse the data.

Presentation and discussion of the results

The following section presents and discusses the research results in accordance with the IMC messages. These include planned messages, service messages, product messages and unplanned messages.

Planned messages

One of the research objectives was to analyse the perceptions of the marketing employees and guests on the hotel's planned messages. It was clear from the responses received during the in-depth interviews that the View Boutique Hotel still has much to do in respect of how it promotes its market offerings. There was an indication of limited use of an effective marketing



communication mix to promote the market offering. The hotel relied heavily on its websites, Facebook, recommendations or referrals from previous guests of the hotel or users of its facilities and its association with the online tour agencies to promote its market offering. The outcome of the study revealed that the hotel was outsourcing its marketing activities to a company that ran these activities for it. This emerged from the responses obtained from the in-depth interviews conducted with the marketing staff and some of guests. The participants all had similar views, in that the majority of them agreed that there was limited use of marketing communication tools by the hotel. One participant stated that “there is limited use of promotional tools, I have noticed that the hotel does not make use of promotional tools like advertising, newspaper, television, radio and media relations to create awareness”. Another participant indicated that “I learnt about this hotel from a friend of mine who has used the hotel before”. The participant added that “you cannot get enough information from the hotel’s website”. Most of the participants were of the view that the hotel website was not as functional as might be expected. This finding is in line with the opinion of Finne and Gronroos (2009:180) that an organisation’s method of communication is basically from the sender’s perspective, that is, it adopts an inside–out approach.

In essence, hotels engage the use of the internet and social media platforms such as Facebook to promote their market offering (Leung & Tanford, 2016:315–516). According to one of the employees “we have an agent that is contracted to handle the marketing promotion, most of the marketing is done on social media and it is online based”. The participant added that “we use online tour agents and Facebook, that is where we do the bulk of our marketing, we don’t do man-to-man marketing”. The participant explained further that “we partner with online tour operators and travel agencies brilliantly, we have managed to double the number of people that use our rooms. From January 2017 to January 2018, the numbers have doubled”. The participant further commented that the “challenges are to get the other facets done, that is, looking at the conferencing and even how to market more to the public”. The participant added that “the main focus of the agent is more on the rooms than we do in other functions”. One member of staff indicated that “we outsource most of our marketing activities to a Cape Town based company”.

Although this marketing communication method is relatively successful, it is not sufficient to promote the product offering of the hotel. Zivkovic, Njegus, Zlatanovic, Gajic and Brdar (2015:26) conducted a study on the mountain hotels in Stara, Planina, Kopaonik and Zlatibor in Serbia to determine guest perceptions of and satisfaction with the hotels. The outcome of the study indicated that social networks could be used successfully by service providers to improve business performance and increase revenue while enhancing the understanding of the needs of the guests/customers. There has been a significant transformation in how hotels operate since the advent of social media and online information. As a result of this, transparency in social media has provided hoteliers with feedback and paved the way for new communication channels. Nevertheless, the researcher was of the opinion that that the View Boutique Hotel should include the relevant traditional marketing mix, for example advertising, personal selling, public relations, sales promotion and sponsorships, in its marketing promotional activities to achieve the desired result.

According to Kotler and Armstrong (2004:77) marketing promotion may be used to describe the various activities designed by an organisation to disseminate the importance or advantages of its product to the target audience, thereby persuading them to purchase/make use of the product. A lot of planning and thought goes into creating the appropriate marketing mix and the hotel management must ensure that the mix chosen is sufficiently flexible so that it will suit subsequent alteration in the market (Cooper Fletcher, Fyall, Gilbert & Wanhill, 2008:565). According to Petzer et al., (2008:7) hotels make use of some of the traditional marketing mix to maximise the potential of their business. A poll conducted recently by



TravelClick, on the way hotels carry out their marketing activities, found that social media can be efficiently used to get to the vast majority of customers. Accordingly, the number of hoteliers who have taken to social media in their marketing activities is increasing with hotels using social media as a marketing and promotion tool. It was found that Facebook was used by 65% of hoteliers, thus making it the favourite social media channel. The users' involvement with a hotel's Facebook page may have an impact on the Facebook page, thereby influencing attitudes toward the hotel brand which in turn may influence hotel booking intentions (Leung & Tanford, 2016:315–316).

In terms of how the hotel should promote its marketing offering, based on the comments received from the participants, it was clear that the View Boutique Hotel should establish a strong online presence. In relation to what is obtainable in the hospitality industry and on social media. Hotels could attract new customers and retain current customers by a more prominent presence on the internet or social media platforms. The majority of the participants expressed similar views on how the hotel should promote its marketing offering and enhance its online presence by extending it beyond Facebook and its website. This view was clear in one of the staff participant's assertions that "our Facebook page is managed by the marketing company that oversees the running of their marketing activities and, as such, is not regularly updated with the latest information from the hotel". Another participant also pointed out that "there is the need for the hotel to have a strong presence on not only the hotel's website or Facebook, but it should integrate social media like Twitter".

In terms of how the View Boutique Hotel ensured message consistency across all its marketing communication channels, this study revealed that there was no message consistency at the hotel. This was evidenced by the different views expressed by the participants. A staff member participant indicated that "we are not communicated to frequently, we hardly have staff meeting and, so, most of the information about what is going on in the hotel is not within our knowledge." Another staff member participant commented that "we have had an incident whereby the staff communicates something to a guest, the manager or the next staff communicate something else to the same guest on the same issue". The participant added that "there is no uniformity there, we have to get the right information on time so that we can speak in one voice". A study conducted by Turkoz and Ayse (2008) on internal marketing and hotel performance revealed that, in organisation such as hotels, messages could be effectively communicated using internal marketing. Internal marketing refers to a deliberate effort that utilises a marketing-like approach to motivate, inform, inform and organise internal customers which, in the case of the study, refers to the employees of the hotel. Thus, internal marketing may be used for making the external customer or guests more satisfied, thus, ultimately, improving business performance and contributing positively to the bottom-line. This section contained a discussion on planned messages, the next section focuses on product messages and provide an explanation of all the items that were included in the interview guide under product messages.

Product messages

The second of the research objectives was to analyse the perceptions of the marketing employees and guests about the hotel's product messages. Product messages are messages that emanate from an organisation's product offering. The participants were asked to comment on the hotel's rooms. The findings indicated that the majority of the participants were satisfied with the hotel rooms. The hotel rooms were clearly well maintained with contemporary decor. However, a few participants were of the opinion that some items in the rooms should be changed or upgraded to fit in with modern decor. Generally, all the participants indicated that the hotel rooms were well maintained and that they were happy with the hotel's product offering as regards the condition of the rooms. One participant stated that "the rooms are



excellent” while another participant asserted that “the décor in the rooms is good and they are relaxing”. One participant maintained that “the hotel’s room is very good, I can’t complain” while another participant commented that “the rooms are okay”. Of the responses two of the participants only suggested that the rooms should be upgraded with one of them stating that “the hotel’s room is perfect, only that, as a fashion designer, I think the curtains and beddings should be changed” while another participant suggested that “the hotel’s rooms should be upgraded”.

With regard to the participants’ views on the food, beverage, entertainment and recreation provided by the hotel, most of the participants tended to agree that the hotel needs to improve on certain issues regarding the beverages stock in the hotel. In addition, although the food was good, there was no entertainment. A few of the participants recommended that the hotel should introduce entertainment such as a live band and dance nights. The participants also suggested that the hotel should take the trouble to get to know the tastes and preferences of their guests as this would make the guests, especially those who visit the hotel frequently, feel special. One of the participants expressed the view that “the food is good, but the beverages are something that the hotel should look into” with another participant stating that “the hotel hardly stocks beverages and this has encouraged the guests to bring their own beverages when they have events or even to go out to purchase beverages”. This assertion was endorsed by another participant who explained that “the other time we had a wedding ceremony here, we had to make arrangement or our own drinks”.

The participants’ recommendations were consistent with the view of Cooper et al., (2008:565-569), who asserted that the primary motive behind marketing devise means to give the customers ultimate satisfaction. Organisations should find new or better ways to ensure that their products and services are used. It is vital that hotels recognise that the tastes, likings, needs, lifestyles, family size and composition of guests differ, and they follow “a policy which increases market demand for their products”. Consistent with the views of some of the participants, food and beverages in the form of excellent dining may have a positive impact on the guests of the hotel. A study conducted by Gundersen, Heide and Olsson (1996), on business travellers revealed that food and beverages are an important aspect of a hotel’s product offering (Lee & Shea, 2015:542).

Research has ascertained that certain factors, such as music, may influence the rate of customer spending behaviour, namely, the pace at which the customer shops, amount of money they are willing to spend, and amount of time they have to stay in a store. Specific to this study, which was conducted in the hospitality context, it has been found that music in a hotel may offer guests more affective experiences that tops brand personality (Suh, Moon & Han, 2015:730). However, the View Boutique Hotel did not have the opportunity to freely play music at functions being held in the hotel’s premises without incurring the negative attention of the residents. This issue of inadequate entertainment like being able to play music, may also impact adversely on a hotel as some guests may not choose to make a repeat visit to a hotel where the entertainment offered, such as music, is restricted with this then ultimately, leading to a decline in the number of customers patronising the hotel. Narteh, Agbemabiese, Kodua and Braimah (2013:408) maintain that it has been established that “It is easier and five times cheaper to keep an existing customer than to recruit a new one”.

Regarding the rates/prices versus the value proposition of the hotel, almost all the participants interviewed agreed that the price/rate was good. Some of the participants were of the view that, since the hotel was a boutique hotel with a five star rating, the price/rate was very good for such a facility. Very few of the participants only were of the view that the price/rate was somewhat high. One member of staff participant stated that: “we have no complaints, our prices are fair, considering we are rated 5-stars we are fair compared to other boutique hotels



with a 5-star hotels”. According to a guest participant “the rates are good, you get good value for the money you pay” while one participant commented on the price/rates of the hotel, saying “that one is good, while another participant stated that “it is good, look at the hotel, the price is good, I can’t complain”. However, four participants disagree with the others with one stating that “the hotel is not your regular kind of hotel, look at the structure and where it is built, the rate should not be this much”. Another participant was of the view that “that the price is not really affordable, not everyone can afford it” while one participant commented that “the hotel is hidden and makes it difficult for anyone who is not conversant with the area to locate it, so I will say the price is high”. Another participant expressed the view that “the price is quite on the high side”. Thus, the study found that most of the participants agreed that the price/rate charged by the hotel was good, while a few disagreed.

In respect of the way in which a hotel influences the product messages to ensure message consistency it is worth noting that product messages may be influenced by improving the hotel’s product offering. In the case of the View Boutique Hotel one participant stated that “facilities such as the conferencing facilities, the rooms, lounges” should be improved while another participant commented that “facilities for the disabled, bar stock and the conferencing could be improved or upgraded”. It is essential that a hotel pay attention to those issues that are posed and address them to get them up to standard. Marketing is also an issue. It was clear from the study findings that an appropriate marketing technique, designed specifically for the View Boutique Hotel, should be put in place. There were obviously not enough rooms designed specifically for the disabled. In fact, at the time the interviews were conducted, there was one room only that catered to the disabled guest.

Clearly, the hotel should address this issue and design more rooms to accommodate the disabled. Concerning the beverages provided it emerged from the responses received from the majority of the participants that the hotel did not stock up sufficiently on beverages. This is a core aspect of a hotel that should not be neglected to ensure that the guests of the hotel do not have to go elsewhere in search of beverages while they are using the hotel’s facility. For there to be consistency in the messages, an organisation should influence the product messages. Product messages are a function of the attributes of a product, for example, form, pricing, performance, durability, reliability, distribution networks, features, conformance with the general requirement, quality, reparability and style. A product is the initial piece of a marketing mix and it should, therefore, should form the foundation of communication decisions (Van der Walt, Strydom, Marx & Joost, 1996:172). Product messages were discussed in the section above. The next section will address service messages.

Service messages

The research objective of this study also includes an analysis of the perceptions of marketing employees and guests of the hotel’s service messages. According to Sangkaworn and Mujtaba (2015:2–3), service messages may be described as intangible and experiential and also viewed as an essential act or performance that an individual or group may offer to another. Intangibility does not result in the ownership of anything. Service quality is of paramount importance for all service providers. A survey on hotels conducted in a study by Sangkaworn and Mujtaba (2015) revealed that the majority of all the customers who took part in the survey listed poor service as the primary reason for switching to other brands, with price following closely as a further reason for switching. It is at this point that relationship marketing should take centre stage as it also plays a role in retain customer loyalty to an organisation – see recommendations by Jung, Ineson and Green (2013:395).

To maximise communication effect, the onus is on the organisation to ensure that the service messages did align with customer. According to Duncan and Moriarty (1997:84), service



messages “originate from interactions with the organisation’s employees”. Clearly, in the hotel context, for the expectations of customers to be met, it is essential that the hotel’s employees are competent, reliable and responsive in that the quality of a service is determined by the capability of the employees. In the case of the View Boutique Hotel, the services provided at the hotel was generally considered to be good as were the prices/rates. It could, thus, be concluded that most of the customers would make repeat visits to the hotel. This conclusion is based on the responses received from the participants. However, the challenge facing the hotel was its marketing relationships.

Commenting on the service messages of the hotel, which referred to the competence of the hotel staff members, the majority of participants generally agreed that their service quality was good and that they were quick to respond to the needs of the guests. However, a few of the participants recommended that some of the staff should be sent for training. One participant stated that the staff of the hotel “respond to my need as quickly as possible while another participant maintained that “the staff are helpful, and they pay attention”. One participant indicated that “the staff members are competent”. However, according to one of the member of staff participants “but the kitchen staff are the problem, there is not enough staff there”. The participant added that “for us, being in the centre of marketing, it is given that we know how to handle guests. However, I feel that more should be done. It is the front people who talk mainly to guests and the emphasis is too much on them. Other staff like the chef, housekeeping, should be included”. Another participant expressed the need for staff training, saying “there is a need for staff training, sometimes guests request to see the chef to pay him/her compliment for the good food, but they shy away because of a lack of training”. A staff member participant asserted “that “when it comes to marketing staff, it is a rule, but others should be trained”, another staff member participant indicated that “all the management of the hotel should provide an all-inclusive training for the staff at all level” while yet another staff member participant expressed the view that “we need training”. Still on the issue of training, one staff member participant stated that “we don’t provide training for the staff because the hotel does not have the resources for that at the moment”.

The finding is consistent with the findings of a study on hotel service quality conducted by Chen and Chen (2014:79). Their study revealed that, in the hotel and restaurant industry, service is the main target with quality service having a significant effect on the accommodation preference of guests. Furthermore, service quality may affect tourism awareness and behaviour intention. It is for this reason that so many hotels make every effort to improve their service quality. Service quality is the outcome of earlier expectations and actual perceptions of customers. While the majority of the participants appeared to be satisfied with the service quality, two of the guest participants did insist that the staff should receive some training on how to deal with guests.

According to Abubakar and Mavondo (2013:843), “factors like nonverbal communication, physical attractiveness, dressing, facial expression, and tone of voice may make a lasting impression on customers” as do employees who are willing to offer guests helpful suggestions. In their study, Abubakar and Mavondo (2013) revealed that, of the 10 key characteristics of successful service firms, three are related to employees. These three include ensuring that the organisation fulfils its service promise to customers, employees are empowered to assist customers and being proactive in ways that go beyond the call of duty and having absolute trust in what the organisation stands for.

The participants were asked to comment on the human relations skills of the staff at the hotel. Service messages emanate from the experience of dealing with an organisation, its employee, agents and products. This includes the behaviour of the members of staff of the organisation, the services provided, whether the system and technology used are in line with the



organisation's objectives and whether the organisation sends out appropriate message about itself. It emerged from the responses given in the in-depth interviews that it would appear that the hotel staff members were not totally committed to their jobs at the hotel because they lacked motivation from management to expend more effort to ensure that the hotel operated smoothly. In general, the participants agreed that more needed to be done in order to improve the human relation skills of the staff. Although many of the guest participants suggested that the hotel staff would benefit from training, they also stated that, overall, they were good, and, if motivated, could do even better. According to one staff member participant "we have a lethargic attitude to work because we are not motivated, we lack incentives" while another staff participant expressed the opinion that the "management should also consider providing more training for us as staff at all levels". One guest participant hinted that the staff also lacked motivation to be proactive because, according to this participant, "there are a whole lot of things, like ideas that we would like to put forward so as to improve on the business of the hotel". The participant continued by saying that "but, after thinking it through, we consider it a waste of time and energy because the management does not acknowledge our effort".

The above statement is consistent with the recommendation of Ottenbacher, Shaw and Lockwood (2005:122) in the study they conducted in 2005. Their findings revealed that successful hospitality service depends on numerous key factors, including the fact that, (specific to this study), success in hotel services occurs when managers allow employees to be proactive and to use their discretion and own judgment in solving problems. In other words, the employees should be empowered and given the autonomy to exercise some form of control over job-related situations and decisions with management delegating responsibilities, providing opportunities for personal initiative and trusting the employees. In the service industry, such as the hotel industry, it is not only sensible to empower the employees but almost unavoidable in that the employees require flexibility if they are to fit their behaviour to the demands of each service they are required to offer, ultimately, resulting in customer needs being met more effectively. In the case of the View Boutique Hotel, the employees were clearly not being given the power to act according to their discretion as they had to follow the orders from the manager. One employee participant stated that "everything must go through the manager; we are not allowed to do things without seeking permission from the manager first". This assertion was confirmed by the manager that participated in the study that "everything that goes out filters through me". In the words of one staff participant "Initially, we tried to attain a certain level for the hotel, we have tried to push ourselves to ensure that business is up and running and that the guests are happy. But we are doing all these for below the job-related salary". According to one of the participants, "the attitude of the staff of the hotel towards the guests is very important". This is in line with the recommendation of Middleton et al., (2009:106) that "Knowing the behavioural variable may be helpful to the hotel in planning their services to enhance the experience customers get from lodging with them". This is possible if there is good relationship established between the guests and the hotel.

Narteh et al., (2013:411) highlighted that research has shown that, when a service provider, in this case a hotel such as the View Boutique Hotel, enters into a long-term relationships with its profitable customers, their spending behaviour will increase over time as a result of their coming to know and understand the organisation and their satisfaction with the quality of the services they receive. There is a tendency on the part of satisfied customers to bring in more businesses to the organisation in question. This describes the practice and positivity of relationship marketing. Every member of the hotel staff has an important role to play – the front desk staff, the cleaner, the chef, the driver – all contribute to the effective running of the hotel. As indicated by Lee and Shea (2015:543) in their discussion on the importance of service delivery, customers are happy when service employees are nice and friendly to them, give them special attention, provide them with extra information to them and satisfy their needs.



According to Sangkaworn and Mujtaba (2015:5), the service messages indicates that the hotel should take into account the speed of the check-In and check-out services. Promotion entails various activities that are put in place by an organisation to ensure that the organisation creates awareness of its products and service offering to its customers and also attracts prospective customers while ensuring that current customers make repeat visits. Regarding the hotel's service messages, one participant stated that "we do not provide any form of training except for the training that was arranged for the front house people by the concierge counsel". The participant added that "this concierge training was also an incentive to the front house people, and they were shown around the environment". The participant also indicated "that only people who have had previous experience in the industry are hire to work at the View Hotel. Once a staff is hired, they are placed on a three months' probation period, if their performance is acceptable, they will be employed formally to continue working". One participant indicated that "the staff are friendly and hands-on, but you can see that they are not forthcoming, there is something reserved about them". Another participant's comment was that "management should get more in touch with the staff, then they can take it from there". Another participant was of the view that "the staff should be trained more and be encouraged to be outspoken" while yet another participant commented that "they should train the workers and give them more information about what is going on here".

In relation to the booking system used by the hotel, based on the responses obtained from the interviews, it was evident that the majority of participants had not experienced any problems. There were numerous ways in which booking could be done at the View Boutique Hotel with guests having the option of booking online or booking directly. Booking online was cheaper than direct booking. It was clear from the participants' responses that they had nothing about which to complain about in respect of the hotel's booking system. According to one participant, the hotel "is listed on Booking.com and Expedia as well". One participant indicated that "the booking system is what every other hotel uses, we also use the Semper booking system". "Generally, when it comes to reservations, it is more or less an international booking system, it is more effective". Another participant stated that "when people book online, the hotel offer guests cheaper options for rooms than when they book direct. We also outsource to an outside marketing company that handles the marketing. They promote the hotels in terms of the expos they attend from time to time. For instance, when it comes to events like wedding, this marketing company provides the hotel with exposure and we get a lot of booking for weddings. People make enquiries about the hotel online and, from there, we get a lot of bookings". As already mentioned, direct booking was more expensive than online booking. One participant indicated that "I have never had any issues with the hotel booking system ever since I started using this hotel", another participant stated that "I cannot complain because the booking system is good" while yet another participant commented that "we have various booking options to choice from, you either book online and get cheaper rates or book directly with the hotel". This participant's statement was in line with the view expressed by Almeida et al (2012:237) that, in the booking decision process, a guest or tourist has the freedom to make a choice on how to do a reservation. The tourist may choose to contact the hotel directly or through other means such as the travel agency. Service messages from a hotel may, for example, be evident through a flawless reservations system developed for the hotel (Petzer et al.,2008:4). This in turn is a way in which the hotel may create and establish meaningful relationships with its customers and achieve a competitive advantage (Lal et al., 2005:261).

The participants were requested to comment on the payment system at the hotel. The study found that generally all the participants agreed that the payment system at the View Boutique Hotel was excellent. Guests have the option to pay with cash, credit or debit cards or a transfer. The guests described the payment system as an easy payment method. One participant stated that "we accept cash, credit card and debit order transfer", another participant commented that "the payment system includes cash, transfer and credit card and it is working well for the hotel", a participant mentioned that "the payment system, you can pay with your credit card, I always make payment with my credit card", one indicated that "the hotel accepts



cash payments so I made a cash payment”, one participant said that “the hotel accepts cash, but you can also make payment with your credit card”, one participant commented that “I have never experienced any problem with payment ever since I have been using this hotel”, one participant stated that “the hotels accept cash, but you can also make payment with your credit card” while one participant indicated that “there are various options to select from, you can pay cash, make payment with a debit or credit card”.

The participants were requested to comment on the quality of the services of the travel agencies. The majority of the responses received indicated that the services provided by the travel agencies could be described as good. According to a participant, online travel agencies (OTAs) “do so much, they bring a whole lot of business to us”. Another participant stated that “the travel agents, especially Acconda and Expedia, bring guests to us” while yet another participant indicated that “the travel agencies showcase the product and service of the hotel”. However, another participant commented that “there is not so much consistency with the travel agencies” although one participant stated that “The online tour operators focus mainly on accommodation, brilliantly, we have managed to double the number of people who use our rooms”. Another participant comment that “the main focus of the travel agent is more on the rooms than other facilities in the hotel. This statement is consistent with the views of Tse (2013:902) in a study conducted on online tour agency. According to Tse (2013), online tour agents are the prime channel for generating hotel room business for hotels. The similarity between the hotel which participated in this study and those in Tse’s (2013) study was that they both worked with almost the same online tour agents such as Expedia.com, and Booking.com out of the numerous online tour agencies, with the studies finding that the use of online tour agents brought business to the hotels in terms increasing the number of people who used the rooms.

When asked to comment on the location of the hotel the reactions and responses of the participants were mixed. However, there was a general concern about the unconventional location of the hotel. However, the location did not stop the participants from using the hotel because, for most of the participants, the hotel is good. The majority of the participant indicated the fact that the hotel was located in a residential neighbourhood was not to the advantage of the hotel. Some of the participants also pointed out that the signage of the hotel needed to be upgraded A participant indicated that “The hotel is on a regular street, next to people’s houses” while another participant remarked that “the hotel has limited facilities and space and, as a result of these factors, holding events on the premises can be restrictive due to the location of the hotel”. However, the majority of the participants expressed the view that the hotel’s physical environment was welcoming. One participant mentioned that “the hotel is located in a regular neighbourhood that also houses other private residents and, as such, when there is an event going on, music may not be played loudly, and the event has to come to an end at around a certain time so as not to cause a disturbance for the neighbours”. Another participant expressed a similar view, stating that “not being able to do certain things like playing music or partying into the night does not work well for the hotel’s business”. Another participant also commented that “it is not easy to locate the hotel; the signage should be made more conspicuous from the main road leading to the hotel”. The comment of one of the participant that “the hotel is located in a private residential neighbourhood” was in line with the view of Kulcsár (2006:81) that, in recent times, the number of hotels located in unusual, unique, interesting environments is on the increase” This trend may be explained by the fact that the attitude of hotel customers is evolving with this highlighting the need for the ongoing analysis of consumer behaviour to enable management to track the progress their organisations are making, either directly or indirectly, in the competitive hotel industry.

The participants were asked to comment on the hotel buildings, that is, the physical environment of the hotel. The findings revealed that, despite the fact that the View Boutique



Hotel is housed in an ancient building that dates to the early days of Johannesburg's development, more than 100 years ago, it is homely and welcoming. It is evidenced from the participants' responses that the guests and staff were happy with the hotel's physical environment and that the View Boutique Hotel provided an enjoyable environment in which the guests could enjoy quality time and value for their money. In addition, the building had lost some of originality due to the renovations and alterations it had undergone in the past years although parts of the original buildings had survived the restoration. According to some of the participants, one could not help but admire the ambience of the building as it was still in good condition, the view from one of the lounges was simply beautiful and it would be easy to stay there forever.

It emerged from the participants' comments during the in-depth interviews on the way in which the hotel influenced its service messages to ensure message consistency. That the hotel staff required training in this regard to ensure uniformity in the service messages the hotel sent out. This highlighted the need for effective communication and internal marketing across all levels of staff. A previous study on internal marketing and hotel performance conducted by Turkoz and Ayse (2008) revealed that, in organisations such as hotels, service messages may be effective using internal marketing. Internal marketing refers to a planned effort that utilises a marketing-like approach to motivate, inform, educate and coordinate internal customers which, in this case, refer to the employees of the hotel. In addition, internal marketing may be directed at creating satisfaction for the external customers or guests, thus, ultimately, enhancing business performance. It is imperative that every member of the organisation is aware of and acknowledges the relationship between what they do and the impact it may have on the customer. To this end, employees may be viewed as customers and treated as internal customers as investing in efficient employees within an organisation, such as a hotel, is tantamount to investing in product quality (Turkoz & Ayse, 2008:150). Furthermore, employees should be engaged in the running of the business. Karatepe (2014:680) suggests that, if employees are engaged in the operation of the business, they perform significantly better as compared to when they are not engaged. Engaged employees tend to experience positive emotions and they tend to rely on their personal resources to perform their work function. In addition, engaged employees also work with devotion.

In terms of how the hotel should influence its service messages to ensure message consistency the recommendation provided were based on the views of the majority of the participants. One participant was of the view that "service message can also be influenced to ensure consistency if the hotel can motivate the staff. I think it has to go back to staff motivation. If we are motivated one way or the other, if we are happy, we will portray a better image of the hotel. Salary is below market related level. It is frustrating". Another participant stated that "we lack motivation". However, one participant expressed a different view, saying "We have staff who are friendly and care about the guests, they are willing to go the extra mile to please the guests". The participant added that "training helps a lot and has its merits, we try here, we are a small establishment, and we don't have funds to do training most of the time, like the other bigger hotels. I often talk with the departments to address issues as they emerge. We discuss when it is necessary". Another participant was of the opinion that "the staff needs training". This section discussed service messages in the View Boutique Hotel context. The next section focuses on unplanned messages.

Unplanned messages

Unplanned messages refer to messages that are sent out through informal means such as news stories, research findings, grapevine, gossip, rumours, and word of mouth, and which cannot be controlled by the organisation (Angelopulo & Barker 2013:45). According to Arens (2006:246), unplanned messages are perceived to be believable due to the sources of these



messages are regarded as credible. McLean (1997:140) states that positive messages from intermediary sources, such as family and friends, help to project a progressive image for an organisation whereas negative messages may damage its reputation. Unplanned messages may also emanate from stakeholders such as guests, through intermediary sources such as news stories, but if they do not emanate from the organisation, they are difficult to control. In fact, all an organisation may be able to do is influence them. External sources of unplanned messages include word of mouth, social media and traditional media which are considered to be credible and unbiased.

The positive messages from intermediary sources such as the type mentioned above may enhance the image of the organisation while, on the other hand, negative messages may damage its image (Duncan & Moriarty, 1997:88). This view is similar to that of Mandan (2005:269) who asserted that consumers are prone to act on the recommendations of previous users of products or services with this type of information dissemination or communication usually stemming from word of mouth or on the social media platforms. Having explained unplanned messages, the questions in the interview guide on planned messages are now discussed to give the readers will a clearer understanding of the topic under investigation.

The participants were requested to comment on the media coverage of the hotel. It was evident from the participants' responses about the media coverage of the hotel as sources of unplanned messages. The majority of the participants felt that the media coverage of the hotel was inadequate. Most of them also agreed that the majority of guests or users of the hotel or the hotel's facilities, for example, as a venue for events, relied on word of mouth or referrals. The hotels' website was not updated regularly and, thus, it was not possible to access current information about the hotel. Most of the hotel patrons appeared to know about the hotel as a result of referrals by friends or relatives, while a few others had learnt about it by coming across the hotel's website or on Facebook. Nevertheless, there was clearly not enough information about the hotel on the website. According to one participant "the hotel does not have enough media coverage". Another participant associated the lack of media coverage of the hotel as the main reason why people were not able to locate the hotel easily – "we don't have enough media coverage". Another participant was of the view that "you don't read about the hotel in newspapers or see the hotel's advertisement, you only see the hotel on the hotel's website" while another participant commented that "even if you go on the hotel's website you will not get information about the hotel". Yet another participant stated that "I got to know of the hotel from a friend of mine, not from any social media". In relation to the staff playing a role in this, one participant stated that the "staff hardly do referrals because they are not motivated by management to carry out such a task".

According Wang, Yu and Fesenmaier (2002:415), social networks are used in order to establish strategies that account for the diverse needs and opportunities of the users, there are four primary interaction modes in using the social network and they include informational, relational, recreational, and transformational. These modes enable the marketer to establish which social networks have the highest potential for positive consumer response. "Social networks, defined previously in many other forms (virtual community, virtual network, online tourism community), have become incredibly significant in tourism, as consumers lean towards trusting other users and their recommendations as opposed to marketing messages". A hotel's presence on the network should be active, entailing two-way communications which are not necessarily focused purely on the hotel itself, but also on other adjoining topics, maintaining that providing consumers with appropriate information will eventually result in gaining their business Jung et al. (2013:395).

In relation to the participants' views of friends and relatives on the hotel, their responses were mixed, some positive and some negative with the participants responded from different



perspectives depending on their individual relationship with and experiences of the hotel. More than half of the participants responded that they liked the hotel and that they always had something positive to tell their friends and relatives about the hotel. According to one participant, “when I took a photograph of the hotel from one of the lounges overlooking the area, I sent it to my mum, and she loved it at once. My mum said that, the next time she visits Johannesburg, she would definitely stay here”. Another participant indicated that “for a long time, I have been staying at the hotel ever since I was introduced to it by my brother. Then I told my cousin about the hotel and the services it provides, the view and the location of the hotel, and my cousin pressed me to take him along when next I visited and, eventually, I brought him here and he has not stopped talking about his pleasurable stay at the hotel”. On the other hand, some of the participants shared that they had had negative experience staying at the hotel.

According to one participant, “with what I experienced here, I don’t think I will stay here again. I was told one arrival that my package included a complimentary spa treatment, only for me to get here and I almost did not get it because the staff who attended to me had not been informed about the package. The issue was only resolved after a long argument and the manager stepped in. I told my mum about it and she was not pleased about it.” However, another participant stated that “my husband cannot stop singing the hotel’s praises. We had a little private time here and he just got hooked, who wouldn’t be?” It was, thus, clear that the participants had different views with some of their friends or relatives liking the hotel because of its location while one participant liked the hotel but was not keen on revisiting it because of the lack of alcoholic beverages. On the other hand, another participant stated that “my friends could not stop talking about how good the hotel is when we had a small get together here” with one participant commenting that “I even have pictures of part of the hotel taken which I sent to my family and they love it”.

In terms of how the hotel resolved complaints, the majority of the participants in the study indicated that generally the hotel paid attention to guest complaints and resolved them in a satisfactory way. It emerged that the View Boutique Hotel had put measures in place to attend to guest complaints and that, according to the guest participants, these measures were entirely satisfactory. For example, there was a guest complaints questionnaire and a suggestion box. One participant stated that “there is nothing much to say, I think the way they handle complaints is okay”, another participant was of the view that “if you have any problems with the staff or the service rendered to you, you can speak to someone like the manager and they look into it, so I will give them a pass mark’ while another participant commented that “I have not had any reason to complain so I don’t know”. According to Lee and Shea (2015:543), when a hotel staff member pays attention to guest complaint and resolve the issue speedily, guests feel more at ease.

In relation to the messages about the View Boutique Hotel from social media, there was a disparity in the views of the participants about these messages. In their responses the participants indicated that the hotel should make a concerted effort to establish a strong online presence in the social media. It was also pointed out that there was not sufficient information about the hotel on its website. On the other hand, one participant stated, “that people who have in one way or another engaged the services of the hotel are pleased according to their experiences they share on Facebook”. One participant commented that the hotel is a place where you would want to spend time if you really want to be alone in a beautiful place. Someone posted a picture of the hotel on social media.” The main drawback for the hotel in respect of social media was that the information on its website was not current. According to a participant, “they need to do a lot of work on this aspect, you can hardly read about the hotel in the internet”. Another participant was of the view that “the hotel does not have a strong



internet presence and you only read about the hotel on the hotel's websites or if a previous guest of the hotel, writes about it and posts it on social media".

According to Nizamuddin (2015:17), organisations such as hotels are employing the use of communication platforms such as social media and user generated content (UGC) as valuable information resources. Hotels do not have any control over social media users or the type of information and experiences they upload on their social media sites, but it is essential that they acknowledge that shared experiences play a role in potential travellers' decision-making. However, negative postings may have a beneficial outcome as negative postings by previous guests of the hotel may result in the management of the hotel devising proactive ways in which to improve their service quality. According to Tse (2013:905), if a hotel is to be able to sustain interest and generate more business, it is essential that it is prominent in social media and that it is responsive to the comments of customers. Both the position and the reputation of a hotel may be enhanced if it ranked and rated on social media as this should, ultimately, bring in new and more business to the hotel. Social media in this regard is powerful or as is positive word of mouth.

In respect of the way in which the hotel influenced unplanned messages to ensure message consistency it from evident from the responses that some of the hotel guests visited the hotel as a result of the perception of previous guests about the service they had received. Social media also helped in this regard although the hotel did not have a strong presence on social media. A participant explained that "people who have been guests at the hotel post their own experiences and perceptions on the internet and others get the message and give it a try". In other words, the hotel received word of mouth referrals. According to Abubakar and Mavondo (2013:838), positive word of mouth (WOM) as a source of unplanned messages may be instrumental as a way of disseminating reliable information, for example, recommending the quality of the service received and making positive remarks about a certain aspect of the service, thereby encouraging friends and family to try the service provider. In addition, word of mouth is important if the type of product or service offering is intangible and based either on the previous experience of users of the service offering or on the credibility of the service provider. It may even be argued that word of mouth is paramount in the success of a service provider. It is important that there is consistency in all aspects of an organisation's communication Šerić and Gil-Saura (2012:825), assert that creating a clear and consistent image is assisted by speaking in one voice and coordinating various marketing. This section presented and discussed the result, the next section will provide a discussion of the managerial implication for the study.

Managerial implications of the study

The study sought to analyse IMC at The View Boutique Hotel. The following section presents the managerial implications of the study

Planned messages

One of the objectives of the study was to analyse the perceptions of the marketing staff and guests about the hotel's planned messages. It is vitally important that the View Boutique Hotel establish a more prominent presence on the internet. The majority of businesses are reliant on the social media because the internet is about to reach a countless number of people in a very short time. More than ever before, the number of individuals who surf the internet for information is increasing with more and more people using the internet to search for information and find good deals. The Hotel could improve its online presence effectively at the basic and reactive levels by creating e-relationships on their websites and also by showing



greater commitment to and making more of an effort to build more features at the advanced levels. This view is consistent with that of Tse (2013:897-898) to the effect that, in the hotel industry, the use of the internet as a marketing platform has shown phenomenal growth and has advanced significantly in the past decade. A few years before this study, approximately one fifth of hotel chains only provided real-time processing of online transactions as a result of insignificant foresight in relation to the strategic use of the internet. The majority of hotels, irrespective of size and/or category, were doing little to exploit the unique transformational potential of the internet. However, electronic business-to-customer development has grown as a result of the internet's potential as a major distribution channel that provides direct communications with hotel customers in a cost-effective way. It is obvious that the internet had fundamentally transformed the hotel industry and hospitality distribution. According to one participant, "the hotel should put more effort in to creating a strong online presence, they are not strong on the social media" while another participant was of the view that "only a few people post comments on the internet, on Facebook, about the hotel".

It was found that the most marketing communication methods used most frequently by the View Boutique hotel included its websites but with social media such as Facebook topping the list followed by word of mouth recommendations and its association with online tour agencies. Although these measures are effective there would be an improvement if the relevant marketing communication mix were included. Kotler and Armstrong (2004:77) advise that, as far as promoting the hotel business and hospitality industry in general is concerned, advertising is the most popular form of promotion. However, it is vital that the advertisements are well planned to ensure that the message they are conveying reaches the targeted audience at the right time if they are to achieve the desired result. This opinion is consistent with that of Cooper et al (2008:557, 605.) who found that, in relation to promoting the hotel business and hospitality industry generally, advertising has been found to be the most efficient and effective form of promotion, provided that the right channel is used, and a suitable place selected for the advertisement. There is also a need for the hotel to sponsor events that will make it more popular and attract media attention. It is recommended that the relevant marketing communication tools should be deployed in an integrated manner to ensure message consistency and maximum impact.

Service messages

The second objective of the study was to analyse perceptions of the marketing staff and guests about the hotel's service messages. Service messages are derived from contact with representatives of the organisation such as the staff. This type of messages is often personal and also strong because of its persuasive nature. A study revealed that it is five times cheaper to retain old customers than to acquire new ones. The responses of the participants during the in-depth interviews provided evidence that service messages are the most highly rated of the four types of IMC messages. The participants recommended that the hotel should endeavour to influence its service messages in being proactive in putting measures in place for the training of staff to ensure that staff members acquire the relevant skills and knowledge that they need if they are to perform optimally. This should also result in the staff being more responsive with the guests. In line with the views of Turkoz and Ayse (2008:150), service messages emanate from the experience of dealing with the organisation and its employee, agents and products. This includes the behaviour of the members of staff of the organisation and the services provided and also whether the system and technology being used are in line with the organisation's objectives and whether they send out appropriate message about the organisation. Findings in previous studies on services messages have shown that in organisations, such as hotels, service messages may be effective when using internal marketing. Internal marketing refers to a planned effort that utilises a marketing-like approach to motivate, inform, educate and coordinate internal customers which, in this case, refers to



the employees of the hotel. Thus, internal marketing is directed towards creating satisfaction for the external customers or guests and, ultimately, enhance business performance.

In a service industry, such as a hotel, there is a need for the location of the hotel to be easily accessible. Accordingly, the hotel should ensure that its signage and directions are more conspicuous than appeared to be the case so that guests and potential customers are able to find the hotel without much trouble. Kulcsár (2014:82) advises that hotels should continuously consider environmental issues such as the elements of external and the internal environment. Although the hotel's parking facilities were safe the participants recommended that the parking be expanded to accommodate more vehicles. In addition, the participants recommended that the hotel should take into consideration the disabled and that the hotel should design more facilities that would accommodate the needs of the disabled.

Product messages

The third objective of the study was to analyse the perceptions of marketing staff and the guests about the hotel's product messages. Product messages are messages which sent out to the targeted audience by the product itself. Thus, product messages refer to messages from the product, price, or distribution elements. According to Arens (2006:246), this type of messages communicates to a large extent the details of the product through the use of colour, type fonts, layout, imagery and design. It is recommended that the View Boutique Hotel should look into its product messages and try to influence these messages by upgrading the facilities and furniture, providing more recreational activities and stocking the bars with an assortment of alcoholic and non-alcoholic beverages so that guests do not have to bring their own drinks or go to the shops to buy drinks when they are making use of the hotel for accommodation or for events. In addition, the hotel should offer activities such as dance nights as well as more entertainment. In other words, the hotel should continuously improve and upgrade its product offering.

Unplanned messages

One of the research objectives was to analyse the perceptions of the marketing staff and the guests about the hotel's unplanned messages. Unplanned messages are regarded as a more credible source of information than the other types of messages. Unplanned messages are generally deemed to be believable because the sources of these unplanned messages are regarded as credible. However, Duncan and Moriarty (1997:88) suggests that it is difficult for an organisation to control this type of messages and that all the organisation may do is influence such messages. External sources of unplanned messages include word of mouth, social media and traditional media. These sources are all considered to be credible and unbiased. It is recommended that the View Boutique Hotel should influence the unplanned messages to ensure that it already acceptable crisis communication method as the guests were clearly satisfied with the method the hotel was using to manage crisis. In order to obviate negativity, the hotel should include the staff in this aspect of crisis communication. The hotel relied extensively on word of mouth as an effective promotional tool to promote its product offering. This method was clearly working in its favour in that it was bringing in more business. In line with the advice of Nizamuddin (2015:17), organisation such as hotels are employing communication platforms such as social media and user generated content (UGC) as valuable information resources. Although hotels do not have any control over what social media users do or the type of information and experiences they upload onto their social media sites, an hotel can influence such messages through its own social media campaigns. It is also imperative that the hotel should monitor media by monitoring the media coverage of its activities to detect negative publicity and then put measures in place to combat such negative publicity.



Significance of the study

It is hoped that, regarding the practical significance of the study, it will empower hotels, such as the View Boutique Hotel, as to the way in which to use IMC to create and foster positive relations with their guests. In addition, the study will fill a research gap on IMC within the hotel sector. It may, therefore, be said that the study should likely make a meaningful contribution to the academic discourse on the use of IMC within the hotel context.

Limitations of the study

The target population for the study was limited to the guests and staff of the View Boutique Hotel, which does not by any means represent the entire population of boutique hotels in Johannesburg, South Africa, as other hotels and towns were not included in the study. This may have caused a bias which ultimately made it difficult to generalise the study findings, or even to make inferences regarding the total population of boutique hotels in South Africa. In addition, the findings may not be applicable to consumers in other places within South Africa. The sampling methods used also introduced further bias because only the manager, the marketing staff and guests of the hotel in the population identified were available to participate. Convenience sampling also excluded suitable qualifying candidates who are not in the right place to be selected or who were late in responding. This may also then result in some groups being overrepresented in the sample. The sample itself may therefore, not accurately represent the targeted population. However, this bias was mitigated by the choice of the three target sampling populations. Accordingly, it may be said, that the study design was justified despite the technical shortcomings and the fact that study also focused on the IMC message typology only. However, it was impossible to generalise the findings of the study to the entire population. The disadvantages of qualitative method include the fact that it does not holistically represent the population that is of interest to the researcher. In addition, because smaller samples were used due to a shortage of interviewers, it was not possible to generalise the study outcomes in any way.

Opportunities for future research

This study focused on analysing the use of IMC at the View Boutique Hotel, Johannesburg. There have been previous studies conducted on IMC and hotels with various ratings in South Africa. The study focused on one of the pillars of IMC only, namely, the IMC message typology. Accordingly, future research could look into the other pillars of IMC such as stakeholders, content, channels and result. It is worth mentioning that this study used only the qualitative research method. It is thus recommended that future researchers should use quantitative research due to the expansive nature of the quantitative research method and the fact that it is possible to generalise quantitative research findings. As compared to qualitative research quantitative research allows for the researcher to select a larger sample that would be more representative of the population, thus increasing the generalisability of the outcome(s) to the population. Using a large sample may also reduce sampling error. In addition, it is also more cost effective and less time consuming to administer questionnaires to a large number of individuals than to conduct interviews with large number of individuals within a specific time-frame.

Conclusion

In this study, in-depth interviews were conducted with both marketing staff and guests. In the aspect of planned messages, the outcome of the study revealed that the hotel uses marketing communication tools on a limited scale and, that to ensure message consistency the manager



handles all external communication activities. However, the study also showed that ensuring message consistency should be the responsibility of all employees in the hotel. With regard to the product messages, the study showed that guests were negatively disposed towards the food, beverages, entertainment and recreation offered by the hotel in terms of quality. However, the service messages of the study indicated that the hotel's service quality was good and that the staff were responsive to the needs of the guests. In respect of unplanned messages, the study showed that the hotel was receiving limited coverage from the media due its limited use of marketing communication tools and that word-of-mouth communication was still an effective marketing tool in the hotel's communication toolbox.

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